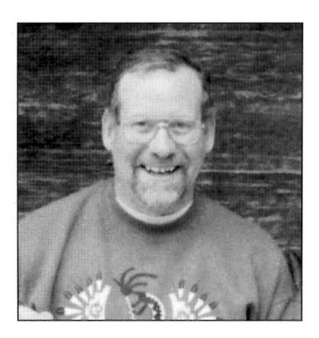
Fortress



Crusader Castles of the Teutonic Knights (1)

The red-brick castles of Prussia 1230–1466

Stephen Turnbull • Illustrated by Peter Dennis



STEPHEN TURNBULL is recognised as one of the world's foremost military historians of the medieval and early modern periods. He first rose to prominence as a result of his book published in 1977, *The Samurai: A Military History*. Since then he has achieved equal fame in writing about European military subjects and has had over 30 books published.



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Series editors Marcus Cowper and Nikolai Bogdanovic

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Editor's note

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Dedication

To our niece Melanie Turnbull, for her 21st birthday and her engagement to Allan Barker.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff and curators of the crusader castles described in the pages that follow for their help and assistance. But above all I thank my dear wife Jo. Our visit to Poland to study the Prussian castles sadly proved to be the last tour she was able to join me on before her death in November 2002. This book is therefore a further memorial to her and how we worked together so happily.

Preface

The crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights are the visible survivors of an astounding medieval enterprise. While better-known armies of crusaders fought Muslims in the Holy Land, the Servants of St Mary of the German House, as the Teutonic Order was officially called, took on the inhabitants of Prussia – medieval Europe's last pagan frontier. During the 13th century they converted the Prussian tribes to Christianity as much with force as with faith, and carved out a kingdom for themselves while so doing. The red-brick castles of Prussia are their architectural legacy.

The convulsions caused by centuries of conflict have meant that the castles of the medieval Teutonic State of Prussia now lie within the borders of three countries. Most of the sites are in modern Poland. A few are in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, particularly along the River Neman (Nemunas in Lithuanian) that marks Kaliningrad's northern border with Lithuania. The important Teutonic fortress of Memel (Klaipeda) is in Lithuania, where two other sites, Kaunas and Trakai, come into the story because of their historic and stylistic associations with the Teutonic Order. The stone-built castles of the Order's northern branch, the Livonian Order, whose possessions now form Latvia and Estonia, are covered in Volume 2 of this work: Fortress 19: *Crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights (2) Baltic stone castles 1184–1560.*

The crusader castles of Prussia represent a unique tradition of fortification. The sites today range from barely discernible ruins to magnificent restorations, but all have two features in common: their close links with the religious life and the use of red brick as the predominant building material. They look most spectacular when illuminated by a low sun, highlighting the colour of blood across these stunning memorials to the crusaders who first opened up the pagan wilderness that was medieval Prussia, and then stayed on to build and defend these magnificent castles.

As almost every place involved has two names, Polish and German, I have tried to use both throughout, choosing one or the other for first mention where the historical context makes it most suitable.

Artist's note

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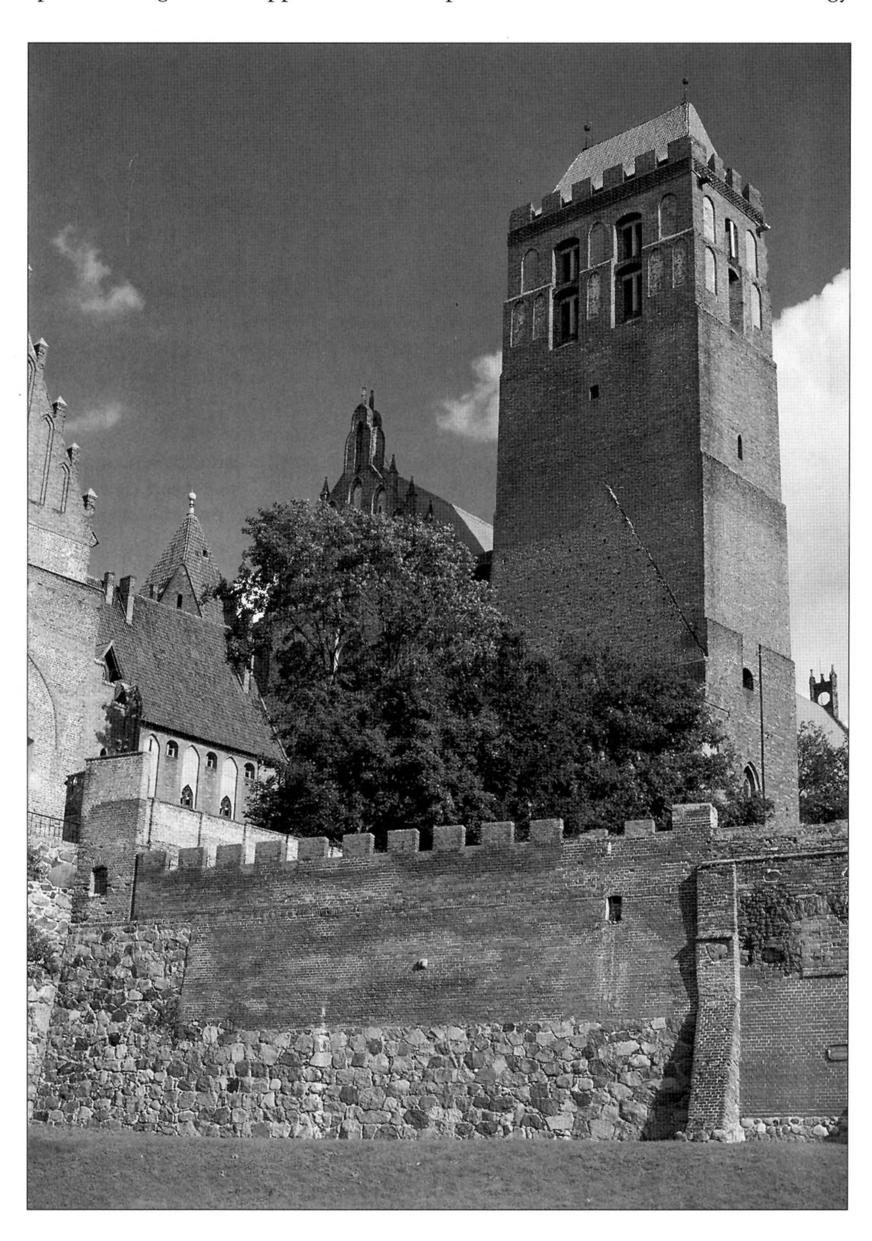
The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

Contents

The development of the crusader castles

The castle builders of the Teutonic Order

By the end of the 12th century the extraordinary adventure that we know as the Crusades had been in operation for 100 years. The crusaders had suffered many disappointments, and the spiritual idealism that had created and sustained orders of knighthood such as the Templars and the Hospitallers seemed to be on the wane. Yet at precisely that point in time a new order of spiritual knighthood appeared. The inspiration came neither from the clergy



The main tower and belfry of the castle of Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) is one of the most important surviving monuments from the times of the Teutonic Knights. It was originally founded in 1232 as a timber castle, and rebuilt on a grand scale in red brick.

nor the army, but from a group of German merchants of Bremen and Lübeck, two cities of the Hanseatic League. The merchants had been active in the Holy Land and took pity on their fellow countrymen who had been afflicted by disease or wounds during the siege of Acre. They therefore built a makeshift hospital that consisted of no more than large tents roofed from the sails of their ships, but their leader obtained a pledge of a donation of land in Acre once the city had been conquered.

When Acre fell a hospital and dormitories were built on the designated plot of land and its leaders applied to the Pope for recognition as a spiritual corporation. This was granted by Pope Celestine III in 1196 and confirmed by Pope Innocent in 1199, the latter insisting that the corporation should become a knightly order, taking its knightly rules from the Templars and its hospital rules from the Hospitallers. Thus was created the Servants of St Mary of the German House, better known as the Teutonic Knights.

The new order of German knights never distinguished itself in battle in the Holy Land, nor did it enjoy the fabulous wealth that was to prove the ruin of other orders. Even though a few members from other lands joined its ranks, the Teutonic Order remained a purely Germanic movement, and one of its most important features was its close association with the German burghers. As we shall see, this was particularly strong in the context of its activities in Prussia, where the development of castles and towns and participation in trade were vital characteristics of the Order's work.

Castles and frontiers

The development of the crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights matched exactly the expansion of the Order's Prussian territories. As the frontier advanced so did the line of forts that defended it, and as time went by and newly conquered lands became permanent possessions, so temporary forts gave way to permanent castles.

There are three phases to the developmental history of the Order's crusader castles. The first lasted from about 1230 to 1283, the time of the conquest of Prussia, and saw the building of the first wooden forts and their replacement by the brick structures seen today. During this period the castles were used both defensively and offensively against the pagan Prussians. The second phase began with the start of the Lithuanian crusade in 1283, when the castles provided the bases for a further advance by the Teutonic Knights into pagan lands. The third phase began when the crowns of Poland and Lithuania were united in 1386 and the Order's Prussian castles began to come under serious attack from their Christian neighbours. This culminated in a series of invasions of Prussia during the 15th century, the first of which produced the famous battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) in 1410. The war concluded with the Second Treaty of Torun in 1466, which handed over all the castles to Poland.

The Prussian crusade

The conversion of pagan Prussia, of which the crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights were a weapon and remain as a memorial, was carried out using the stick and carrot approach of mission and warfare from the year 1230 onwards. The Order was first invited into Prussia at the request of a Polish dignitary, but it always needed the help of allies from the Hanseatic League, Polish knights, Papal legates and German colonists to do its job properly. The Order also displayed considerable diplomatic skills to avoid having to share the sovereignty of the lands that they conquered. This land, on which the castles were built, was jealously guarded as the property of the Teutonic Order, who owed allegiance directly to the Pope and to no one else.

When the Prussian crusade began at the beginning of the 13th century Prussia was inhabited by a number of pagan tribes. They had no organised state system and were ruled by lords who cherished their independence from both



Map showing the location of the most important crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia. (© Osprey Publishing Limited)

their Christian neighbours and each other. Their small territories bore such exotic names as Pogesania, Nattangia and Warmia. The Prussians farmed and hunted, sometimes raiding across their ill-defined borders and at other times trading with foreign merchants through the Vistula (Wisla) delta. Theirs was a wild land of swamps and forests stretching from the Baltic Sea in the north to the borders of Poland in the south and west and the Lithuanian forests to the east. Attempts had been made in the past to colonise and Christianise the Prussians, but until the Teutonic Order arrived on the scene they had stubbornly resisted all attempts to conquer and convert them.

A valuable lesson was learned in 1223. A motley crew of German and Polish crusaders gathered for a raid against the Prussians near Kulm (Chelmno). This provoked a fierce counterattack by the pagans and the there were many casualties on the crusader side. As a result of this debacle Duke Conrad of Masovia, a Polish nobleman, invited the Teutonic Order into Poland to help in the noble endeavour. In return for their services the Order would be granted the

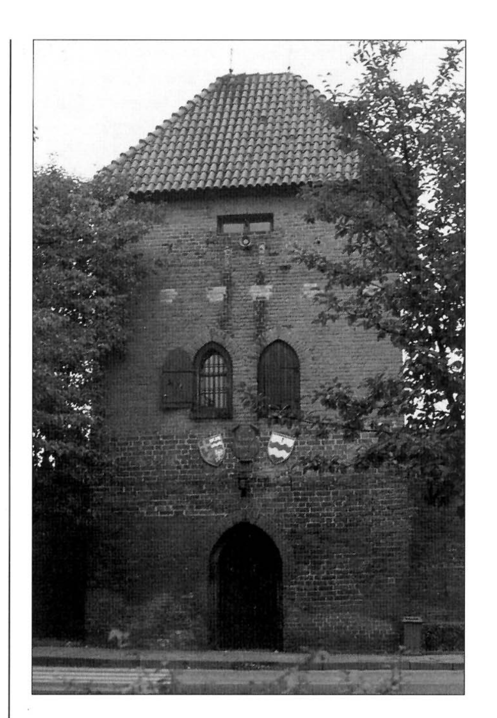


The Prussian Crusade of the Teutonic Knights, from a painting in the Torun Historical Museum. The Teutonic Knights are depicted in their characteristic white mantles with a black cross. The conversion of Prussia was the enterprise that led to the establishment of the crusader castles.

territory of Chelmno and any further lands they conquered in the course of the operation. The current Grand Master, Hermann von Salza, immediately recognised the opportunity that had come his way. With the support of Emperor Frederick II, in 1226 the Pope granted the Golden Bull of Rimini which set out in minute detail the constitution of the future state that the Order already intended to win for itself.

The Teutonic Knights' Prussian crusade thus began, and the first castle to be associated with the Order as part of the campaign was given to them by Duke Conrad of Masovia. It lay on a hill on the south bank of the Vistula across the

The city of Thorn (Torun), viewed from across the Vistula (Wisla). Thorn was another of the earliest settlements of the Teutonic Knights in Prussia. The castle of Thorn was founded in 1231.



One of the towers in the town walls of Kulm (Chelmno). Kulm preserves the most complete example of a Teutonic Order fortified town wall in the whole of Poland. It was one of the earliest settlements of the Teutonic Knights.

river from the place where the city of Thorn (Torun) would be established, quite near to the point where the River Drewenz (Drweca) joined the Vistula. It was a modest affair, and was garrisoned by only seven knights under the Brandenburger Conrad von Landsberg. They were supported by up to 100 squires and sergeants, with servants to bake bread, brew beer, wash clothes and look after the horses. The joint roles of monk and soldier established in the Holy Land were continued at the castle, and doctors were also present to maintain the Order's function as a provider of hospitals. They called the castle Vogelsang, or 'bird song', an ironic name that referred to the cry of a dying swan, according to the Order's chronicler.

There were not many pagans left in the immediate area of Chelmno, nor did they consider the new arrivals a threat until Conrad led his men out of their new castle to pillage and burn the homes of anyone who refused to accept baptism. In 1230 reinforcements arrived under Herman Balke, who was to head the crusade in Prussia for many years. He first built another castle next to the river below Vogelsang to act as a harbour and, with this as a base, armed strikes across the Vistula began. Previous moves against the Prussians had headed east into the forests of the interior, but Balke decided first to secure the prominent bend in the line of the Vistula to the north. Within a short space of time all the inhabitants of the lands around Chelmno had been converted, so Duke Conrad of Masovia kept his word and handed over the conquered territory to the Order. In 1231 Thorn was founded on the north bank of the river opposite Vogelsang. They renamed Chelmno Kulm and the district Kulmerland, and rebuilt the previously destroyed castle at Kulm in 1232.

The fortress line expands

With Kulm and Thorn secured, the war continued with great brutality on both sides. The Prussian leaders killed anyone they captured who had converted as a result of Teutonic pressure, and the Order responded with equal ferocity.



The fortress of Reden (Radzyn Chelminski) was established in 1234 to protect the traditional invasion route into Kulmerland from the east. Reden was rebuilt in brick at the end of the 13th century. It was partly devastated in 1410, but its ruins still show signs of a high level of artistry in a fortress built when military needs were paramount. Here and there the use of patterned brick for no other reason than decoration can be seen. Its windows are tall and narrow, making the whole place look like a fortified church.

However, the line of fortresses moved on and, in 1232, a very important castle was founded. It was called Marienwerder and is now known as Kwidzyn. It would appear that Herman Balke had experienced some difficulties the previous summer from nobles who regarded it as beneath their knightly dignity to have their followers involved in labouring work, so a message from the Pope was circulated urging them to recognise the importance of this form of service.

The Pope's message was highly effective, and names such as Conrad of Masovia and Henry the Pious of Silesia (who was to lose his life against the Mongols at Liegnitz) are noted among those present at the holy building site. An added incentive was provided by the presence at Marienwerder of a fragment of the True Cross, which was a considerable lure. By the time the crusaders gathered at Marienwerder the enthusiastic Balke had already begun digging the foundations and stockpiling supplies. He also assured the visiting crusaders that there would be some military action when Marienwerder was finished and so many labourers were supplied that the timber castle was completed in just four weeks. Many crusaders then went home, but others stayed on as winter began, hoping for the action they had been promised. This action finally took place beyond Pomesania in Pogesania on the Sirgule River, where the Teutonic Knights and their Polish allies crossed the frozen surface and inflicted a severe defeat on a Prussian army.

When the Poles finally went home the Teutonic Order no longer had the military capacity to follow up the victory, so they concentrated instead on strengthening their defensive line. Their next foundation was Reden (now Radzyn Chelminski) in 1234, which protected Kulmerland from the east. Two more years were to pass before anything else was accomplished. The inactivity is partly explained by the fact that the Sword Brothers of Riga suffered a disaster at the battle of the Saule in 1236. The survivors were incorporated into the Teutonic Order. This meant that the obligations of the Order now included relations with Novgorod and Lithuania as well as Prussia and their ongoing commitments in the Holy Land.

The crusade in Prussia was revived in 1236 when 18-year-old Count Henry of Meissen arrived with 500 soldiers and an equal amount of fanaticism. He first pacified the Pogesanians, destroying their timber forts, and in 1237 packed all the tools that would be needed to build a castle into two cogges, the sturdy ships that were among the assets that gave the Order a military advantage. Henry sailed down the Nogat River to the lagoon known as the Frisches Haff (Zalew Wislany), which is separated from the Baltic by a long spit of land, and turned up the Elbing River to an island where he built his fort. This was the first castle at Elbing (modern Elblag). It was to become a very important foundation that provided the base for subsequent naval operations against the Prussians of Warmia, Nattangia and Bartia. But the Prussians, who had been used to raids by Vikings over the ages, hit back and, during one crusader attack on a fort called Balga (Veseloe in Kaliningrad) 35 miles northeast of Elbing, they cut off the raiding party and killed every man in it. In 1239 a major Teutonic expedition moved against Balga and captured it. The local Warmian Prussians surrendered and Balga became the Order's latest possession, although the Convent (local headquarters) of the Knights had to be located some distance away because of the swampy ground.

Balga, now the Order's furthest outpost, soon received its first 'guest crusader'; a phenomenon that was to become very important to the Order's fighting strength and finances over the following century. Duke Otto von Braunschweig arrived by sea, bringing his entire court with him. He was a devotee of hunting, which helped to relieve the monotony of such a remote location until the Prussians obligingly attacked Balga and gave Duke Otto some very welcome military action. At one time the garrison of Balga also entertained a pagan prince from Sambia, the neighbouring territory across the Pregel River that was the Order's next intended target. His report back to the

This section of Thorn (Torun) castle, left exactly on the spot to which the enthusiastic citizens of Torun toppled it, provides a dramatic illustration of the notion of the 'fall of a castle'. Without any outside help they demolished almost all of one of the Teutonic Order's grandest edifices in 1454.



Sambian leaders is a fascinating outsider's view of life in the early Prussian castles. He was particularly amazed when he saw the brothers eating cabbage. He concluded that they were eating grass, and wrote 'who can withstand such a people, who can feed themselves in the wilderness and eat grass for food? He also noted in admiration that:

> The brothers are of flesh and bone like we are and they wear clothes, carry weapons and eat food like us. But they are different in one practice, in which they are superior to us. They have the custom of getting up in the night and going to their church together; and also often in the daytime, and praying to and praising their God, and that is something we do not do. Therefore, they will overcome us in battle, and we cannot come out victorious.

As noted earlier, the native Prussians had at first been surprisingly unconcerned by the threat that the Order posed to them, and did not even attempt to interfere with the strange castles that were beginning to spring up beside their river banks. When the Prussians finally realised what was going on

The castle of Marienburg, now known as Malbork, is deservedly one of Poland's finest tourist attractions and is one of the most spectacular medieval castles in Europe. This view is taken looking directly across the Nogat River to the twin towers that once provided an entrance to the castle from the long-demolished bridge.



and rebelled, they were defeated by a numerically inferior crusader army that was better organised both militarily and economically than they were. This economic factor was very important. Unlike the crusader castles of the Holy Land, which knights built and then returned home, the ties between the military and commercial worlds of the Prussian castles were very strong. Settlers came from all over Germany to work the newly opened lands and populate the towns that grew up beside the castles.

From a military point of view, the fact that the Teutonic Knights were always outnumbered by their new Prussian subjects led to the adoption of a way of warfare that was prudently defensive, and in this the crusader castles played a vital role. It also encouraged the Order not to attempt to convert the Prussians in large numbers for fear of giving them political equality with their new masters. This was such a cynical attitude that the Order's avowed aim of evangelising among the heathen was called seriously into question, and people began to suspect that territorial aggrandisement was all that really mattered. In fact, in 1237 the Pope found it necessary to intervene against the Order on behalf of the Prussians, but until 1241 the progress of the crusade continued almost unimpeded.

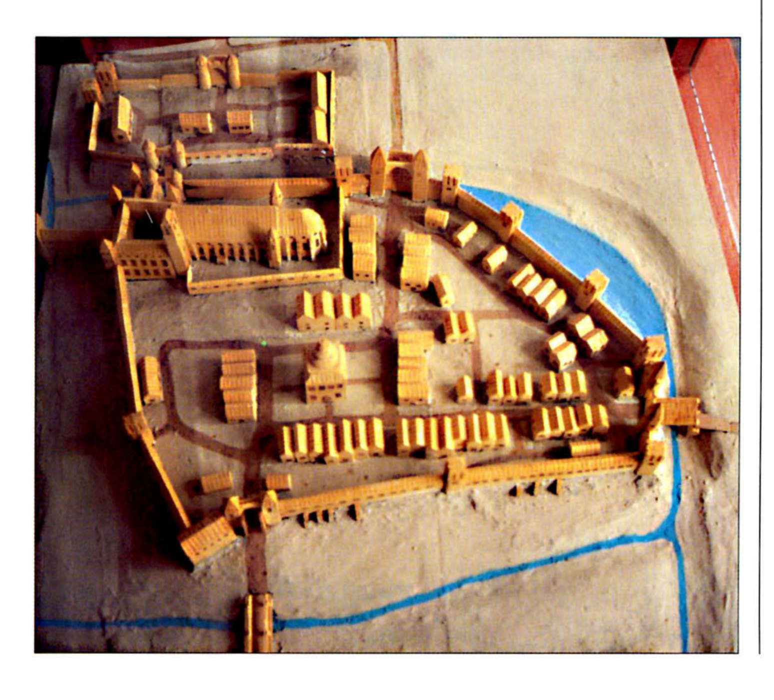
The first Prussian revolt

A challenge was also posed to the dominance of the Teutonic knights by former allies who had originally been sympathetic to the Order's advance until they saw them as economic competitors. The most serious of these was the Polish Duke Swantopelk of Pomerania, who was based at the port of Danzig (Gdansk). The Teutonic Knights had initially helped him by defeating the Prussians, but now the merchants of Thorn, Elbing and Marienwerder were threatening his trade, and their settlements challenged the domination that he exerted over the Vistula delta. So, in 1242, he formed an alliance with the free Prussians against the Order and supported them with his fleet of river boats.

The Teutonic Knights hated Swantopelk like no other, seeing him as a traitor. He was after all a Christian who had fought beside them at the battle of the Sirgule River. This had also made him experienced in their ways, and he realised that when the Order's troops were fighting on dry level ground within reach of one of their castles their heavy knights and crossbowmen had the advantage. When they were besieged, the knights brought in supplies on riverboats, and crossbow fire usually drove the Prussians away unless they could somehow burn the stronghold down. However, under Swantopelk's direction the Teutonic forts were attacked using the element of surprise. Bartenstein (Bartoszyce), Rössel (Reszel) and other minor fortresses were soon lost and 4,000 Germans were killed. Soon only Elbing and Balga survived in the eastern area. Then Marienwerder also fell, leaving untouched only the area bounded by Thorn, Kulm and Reden. The situation seemed desperate, but new heart was given to the Order when Dietrich von Bernheim led a raid into Pomerania, sacked the Polish castle of Sartowitz downstream from Kulm and brought back as booty, of all things, the head of St Barbara.

Years of raids and counter raids followed. Marienwerder was regained and,

This model on display inside the museum of Kwidzyn castle shows how little remains of the original magnificent Marienwerder. The section on the left towards the top is what we now know as Marienwerder (Kwidzyn). The sewage tower may be identified, projecting then into the river, and its section of the castle connects with the church that is now Kwidzyn's cathedral.





The ruins of Christburg (Dzierzgon) castle as they appeared in the 17th century. Nothing now remains of this once important crusader castle.

on Christmas Eve 1247, the Teutonic Knights captured the most important enemy fort in Pomesania. The castle was rebuilt nearby, and renamed Christburg (Dzierzgon) in memory of the day on which it fell. In the end it was negotiation, not force, that ended Swantopelk's intervention. He agreed to share the Vistula delta with the Teutonic Knights. But Swantopelk had other cards to play and made an unusual deal. The peninsula of Sambia was ripe for conquest and the Teutonic Order was the obvious candidate to carry it out. However, Swantopelk indicated that if the King of Norway conquered it first then he would receive his support, not the Order.

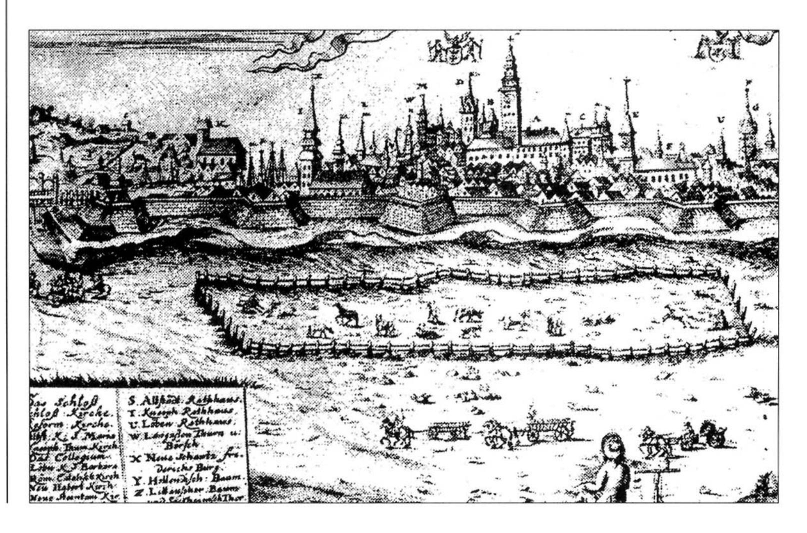
Naturally enough, the Order stepped up its efforts to cross the Pregel River, and were helped in this by King Mindaugas of Lithuania. Alliances with Lithuania were to become almost as common as warfare with that country over the next century. Mindaugas allowed the Order to build a castle at Memel (Klaipeda in modern Lithuania) at the northern end of the Curonian Spit in Samogitia (Zemaitija in Lower Lithuania). This enabled the Order to outflank Sambia. Memel withstood a Prussian attack from Sambia using a bridge of boats, and then provided a base for an attack on Sambia from the north by the Livonian chapter of the Order. But the Teutonic Knights knew that they could not conquer Sambia alone, even from two sides. Fortunately for them King Ottokar of Bohemia then joined the Prussian crusade. His army marched via Elbing and Balga and crossed the frozen Pregel in January 1255. Sambian resistance collapsed and, as usual, a new fortress was established to control the new territory. It was named Königsberg, the 'King's Mountain' in honour of Ottokar. It is now the capital of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

The second Prussian revolt

The castles came under threat again in 1260 when the Prussians rose in revolt for a second time. One of their leaders was Henry Monte, who had been taken to Germany as a hostage and educated there, so he, like Swantopelk, was able to play the Order at its own game. There was an early and very dramatic incident when a certain dignitary of the Order invited some Prussians to his castle. They attacked him during the feasting, so he swore a terrible revenge:

> Later the brother invited them to visit him in his castle many times as if nothing had happened, and he treated them kindly. But when they were drunk they began to talk about killing him, and when he heard that talk about him, he went out and barred the door. Then he set it on fire and burned his guests and his castle together.

Königsberg, one of the most important of all the Teutonic Knights' fortresses. Nothing now remains of this once mighty castle, the site of which is now within the city of Kaliningrad in the Russian enclave of the same name.

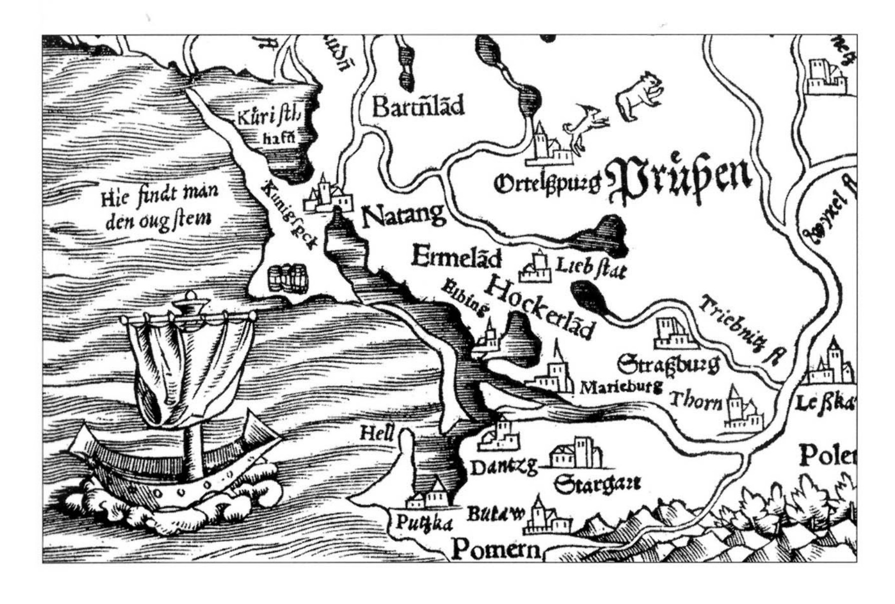


This was the start of another ten years of war, during which the Order's rule in Prussia almost disintegrated. The Prussians were now better organised and equipped with crossbows of their own as well as siege machinery, and conducted river battles and sieges that lasted up to three years. Bartenstein (Bartoszyce) held out the longest into the year 1264, and Königsberg was only saved by intervention from Livonia. By that time two Masters of the Order had been killed in battle and the brothers had again been reduced to their strongest forts.

The fall of the crusader castles in the east allowed the Prussians to move westward. Reden was raided in guerrilla attacks and then Marienwerder became a target. Seeing a small force of marauding horsemen the citizens and garrison went out in pursuit and followed the invaders into an ambush. The raiders chased them back into the town, which they took, burning the place and killing all who could not flee into the castle and bar the gates behind them. Kulm was next, and this raid was so sudden that a group of pilgrims were caught at the dedication of a hospital outside the town. Hundreds were killed, and the Bishop of Kulm escaped only to die shortly afterwards from shock and mortification. The castle, however, stood firm.

Prompted by the Pope, who urged anyone who had taken the cross against the Mongols to reconsider and come to the aid of the Order instead, new German crusaders headed east and the defensive line of castles was strengthened. The Bishop of Sambia built a castle at Lochstädt at the entrance to the Frische Haff, so that sailing to Königsberg would be much easier and, in 1266, the Duke of Brandenburg built a castle in Nattangia halfway between Balga and Königsberg and named it Brandenburg (Ushakovo). It was lost soon afterwards when its commander was out on a raid and a native woman employed in the castle informed the Prussians of his absence.

By 1270 the Teutonic Order resembled a boxer who has been badly beaten but is still on his feet. Their commitments elsewhere denied them the manpower to mount a decisive expedition against the Prussians. Instead a desultory war of raids, launched from within the protection of the castles, paralleled the mode of warfare that the Prussians were conducting against them. It was a positional war of the type that would become the rule in the next century, and it was the Order's line of castles, which now ran down the Vistula, along the coast and up the Pregel, that eventually gave them the upper hand. Sturdy brick was now replacing the old wooden fortresses. The Prussians simply destroyed any fortress they captured because they lacked the technology and the resources to develop the site. To them swamp and forest were better defences than brick walls.



An interesting old map of Prussia showing the shore of the Baltic Sea looking inland. We note Königsberg, protected by the double spit of land. Along the Vistula lie Marienburg and Thorn. The castles of Strasburg (Brodnica), Elbing (Elblag) and Ortelsburg (Szczytno) are also shown. Danzig (Gdansk) appears prominently by the sea.

OPPOSITE TOP Grand Master Siegfried von Feuchtwangen, who served in that capacity from 1303 to 1311, was responsible for one of the most important developments in the history of the crusader castles of Prussia when he moved the headquarters of the Teutonic Order from Venice to Marienburg (Malbork) in 1309. This statue of him stands inside the courtyard of the Middle Castle of Marienburg. The High Castle can be seen behind him.

New castles and new enemies

The situation was finally restored in 1271 under Marshal Konrad von Thierberg, and the quelling of the second rebellion led to a hardening of the Order's attitude. They now demanded complete submission from the Prussians, whilst the Prussian nobility were reduced to serfdom. More German settlers were encouraged to come and set up in the towns, and several new castles appeared, including Marienburg (Malbork) on the Nogat River, built in brick and destined to become the Order's celebrated capital. Not far away, on the west bank of the Vistula, Mewe (Gniew) was donated to the Order by its owner when he joined their brotherhood. Similar brick castles also appeared along the line of the Drewenz upstream from Thorn, including Schönsee (Kowalewo Pomorskie) Gollub (Golub-Dobrzyn) and Strasburg (Brodnica), until by the end of the 13th century the Order controlled a network of about 120 fortresses arranged more densely than anywhere else in Europe.

According to the Order's chronicler, in the year 1283 the Prussian crusade officially finished and the Lithuanian crusade began. This latter expedition lasted a century and a half as the brothers tried to extend their lands through Samogitia to give them a corridor through to their brethren in Livonia as well as north-east into the vast forests of Lithuania. 'Guest crusaders' came from all over Europe to join in the Lithuanian campaigns. Henry Bolingbroke, Earl of Derby and later King Henry IV of England. was the Order's most illustrious English guest. The chronicler noted that, at the siege of Vilnius, Bolingbroke 'had many fine archers, who did much good'. From this time onwards, the red-brick castles took on a new role as the administrative centres of the Order's Prussian state. They were also military bases where they would assemble, entertain and feast a succession of guest crusaders who set off for the glorified manhunt that characterised the cruel war of attrition in Lithuania. Between the years 1305 and 1409 there were over 300 campaigns from Prussia or Livonia into Lithuania. However, although the Order never suspected it at the time, the Prussian state that their castles defended was now at the greatest extent that it would ever occupy. The reason for this was the changing attitude of the state of Poland.

Map showing the north-eastern frontier of the Teutonic Order's Prussian state and its relationship to the Nemunas and Neris Rivers. The sites of the castles of Trakai and Kaunas in Lithuania are also shown. (© Osprey Publishing Limited)



Up to this point in time Poland had done very well out of the Order's intervention. Just as Conrad of Masovia had hoped, the Teutonic Knights had pacified their most dangerous neighbours and safeguarded their communications with the Baltic. It was only when the Order began to expand in directions that were to the Poles' disadvantage that friction developed. Swantopelk's anger was the outstanding early example. Matters came to a head again between 1307 and 1309 when the Order intervened to raise the siege of Danzig (Gdansk) by the Margrave of Brandenburg. They followed up their success by driving the army of the Margrave of Brandenburg completely out of Pomerania. Feeling that they deserved a reward, the Order presented the Polish king with a bill for services rendered. Such a blatant interference in Polish affairs was intolerable, so the Poles refused to pay up. In retaliation the Order decided to keep Danzig in their possession until the account was settled. Poland gave an equally high priority to regaining entry to the Baltic, and almost two centuries of rivalry followed.



In the same year of 1309 the brothers of the Teutonic Order made the momentous decision to move their headquarters. Up to this point it had been located in Venice (Acre had long been abandoned) but in 1309, as a statement of the centrality of Prussian affairs, it was relocated to the great castle of Marienburg. At first sight the precise location looks a strange choice, because Marienburg was at the western edge of Prussia. But as the brothers now controlled Pomerania, Marienburg was far more central both physically and conceptually to their vision of Teutonic Prussia. Crusading ideals were now secondary to the simpler aim of keeping hold of Prussian territory, and the expeditions against Lithuania were a key element in the operation. The confident brothers, secure within their network of crusader castles, were sure that they could keep any Polish army at bay, and so it was to prove for many years while the Lithuanian crusade continued unabated.

Then came a devastating blow. In 1386, midway through the Order's long and savage war against the pagan Lithuanians, the king of Lithuania accepted both baptism and the crown of Poland. No longer could the fiction of a crusade be sustained. The war was now Catholic Prussia against Catholic Poland/Lithuania, and the struggle reached its climax in 1410 when King Wladislaw Jagiello and his cousin Grand Duke Alexander Vytautas (Witold) the Great of Lithuania launched a major invasion of Prussia. The goal was Marienburg, but the Teutonic Knights crossed their path only to be defeated at Tannenberg (Grunwald) in one of the largest battles of the Middle Ages. There followed half a century of intermittent warfare between the Order and Poland/Lithuania, with the Prussian crusader castles often serving as the front line. With the signing of the second Treaty of Torun in 1466 nearly all the castles of the Order passed into Polish hands. It was the end of an era.



The town gate of Allenstein (Olsztyn), a typical example of the extension of the red-brick fortress architecture of the Teutonic Order to the defences of a town.

Chronology

1190	The founding of the Teutonic Order in the Holy Land
1226	The Golden Bull of Rimini
1228	The Order is granted Kulmerland (Chelmno) in Poland
1231	The castle of Thorn is built
1233	The first castle at Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) is established
1234	Papal permission is given for the Order to form a secular state
1237	The Sword Brothers of Livonia are absorbed by the Teutonic Order
1242	The Teutonic Order is defeated by Alexander Nevsky at Lake Peipus (the battle on the ice)
1291	The fall of Acre. The Order moves to Venice
1309	The order's headquarters are moved from Venice to Marienburg (Malbork)
1370	Death of King Casimir III of Poland
1377	Accession of Jogaila as Grand Duke of Lithuania
1381	Deposition of Jogaila
1382	Deposition and murder of Kestutis and escape of Vytautas
1383	Reconciliation of Jogaila and Vytautas
1386	Wladislaw Jagiello is baptised and becomes king of Poland
1391	Siege of Vilnius
1401	Formal alliance between Poland and Lithuania
1404	Peace treaty between Poland/Lithuania and the Teutonic Order
1409	The second Samogitian Rebellion ends with another peace treaty
1410	**15 July** The battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald)
1410	**9 November** Heinrich von Plauen is elected Grand Master
1410	**10 December** New truce established
1411	First Treaty of Thorn (Torun)
1416	Council of Constance
1422	Gollub War and the Treaty of Melno
1430	Death of Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania
1433	Capture of Dirschau (Tzcew) by Bohemian mercenaries
1434	Death of King Wladislaw Jagiello
1440	Formation of the Prussian Union
1446	Accession of King Casimir IV of Poland
1454	Poles defeated at Chojnice. The Thirteen Years War begins
1457	The fall of Marienburg (Malbork)
1462	Battle of Lake Zarnowiec
1466	Second treaty of Thorn (Torun)
1525	Secularisation of the Teutonic Order

Design features of the crusader castles

The first wooden fortresses

The Teutonic Knights had come from the Holy Land to Prussia well experienced in the building of castles, but in the savage lands of the north the environment and conditions for construction were very different. Their Prussian territories were almost literally carved out of the dark forests and swamps with their meandering rivers, and the pioneer knights were handicapped by a shortage of labour, no local building skills and few deposits of workable stone. The technology of building in brick existed and had been demonstrated effectively in Denmark, but the settled conditions and reserves of manpower simply did not exist on the Prussian frontier.

The result was that the first Prussian castles resembled those of the natives that were destroyed by the Order's army. They were often hastily built from timber, usually oak, because the stone laboriously gathered from fields was only sufficient for foundations. The forts were thus rough-hewn wooden blockhouses, sometimes built upon a crude and simple stone base of undressed boulders, encircled by wooden palisades and with the lay of the land determining the contour of the walls. With so many rivers and swamps around, water defences played an important part in a castle's layout. Rivers provided a barrier in summer and roads during the winter, so the castles were often located on a promontory where two rivers met.

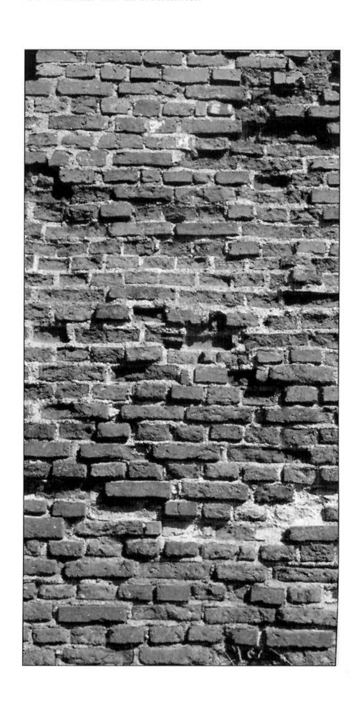
Wooden castles were of course vulnerable to attack by fire, so during the 13th century an attempt was made to bring masons in from Germany to build stone castles. However, as noted above, stone was scarce, and in Prussia no more than five castles were converted from wood to stone by 1250, so timber kept the knightly communities alive until brick succeeded stone as a cheaper and more readily available material. The average garrison of a wooden castle would be about a dozen knights, together with 100 or more soldiers, mercenaries, native militia and servants.

In time, all the permanent castles of Prussia were converted from wood to brick, but it is also important to note that wooden castles continued to be built even when brick castles were well established, but these were constructed as temporary fortresses during expeditions into enemy territory. If such a foray was likely to take some time, then it was sensible to build a temporary base rather than rely on a succession of flimsy encampments.

The design of the brick castles

The strongest impression made on any modern visitor to the extant crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights of Prussia is the preponderance of brick as a building medium. In marked contrast to the Livonian castles, stone usually appears only in the form of foundations that extend a short way above ground. This overwhelming use of brick to build castles comes as something of a surprise to visitors from England, where castles tend to be of stone and brick is associated with Victorian railway sheds and Lancashire cotton mills. But on close inspection the effect of using brick is very pleasing to the eye and most impressive from a military point of view. At sunset they glow red, and at midday the contrast between a red-brick wall and a blue sky is very striking. The red-brick castles of Prussia are soon revealed to possess both a striking unity about them and a deceptively simple beauty of design. The overall impression given by the castles, from the most glorious restored fortress to the

Detail of brickwork, the most important element in the design of the Prussian castles of the Teutonic Knights. This example is at the castle of Trakai in Lithuania.





Early timber outpost – Marienwerder (Kwidzyn)1234
This is a bird's-eye view of the first castle to be erected on the important site of Marienwerder. It is a typical early 'frontier' timber castle in Prussia built beside a river in densely wooded countryside. The central tower consists of a three-storey wooden structure on a stone base inside a double encircling palisade, the lower section of which projects out almost horizontally. The interlocking timbers that make up the walls are an important feature. The roof is steeply pitched to dislodge heavy snow. Outbuildings stand within the bailey. The approach to the castle is over a narrow wooden bridge of rough timbers, defended by a fortified gate and watchtower. A fierce band of Pagan Prussians are shown attacking it.

humblest pile of ruins, is that this 'red-brick Gothic' style possesses a stylistic severity that exudes the spirit of the military state that created it. It is a functional Gothic, stripped of the more light-hearted refinements that this style managed to achieve in the cathedrals of France and England. It is a bold beauty that is also as chilling as the reputation of the Teutonic Knights themselves. In short, it is a style of military architecture that is aggressive as much as it is defensive.

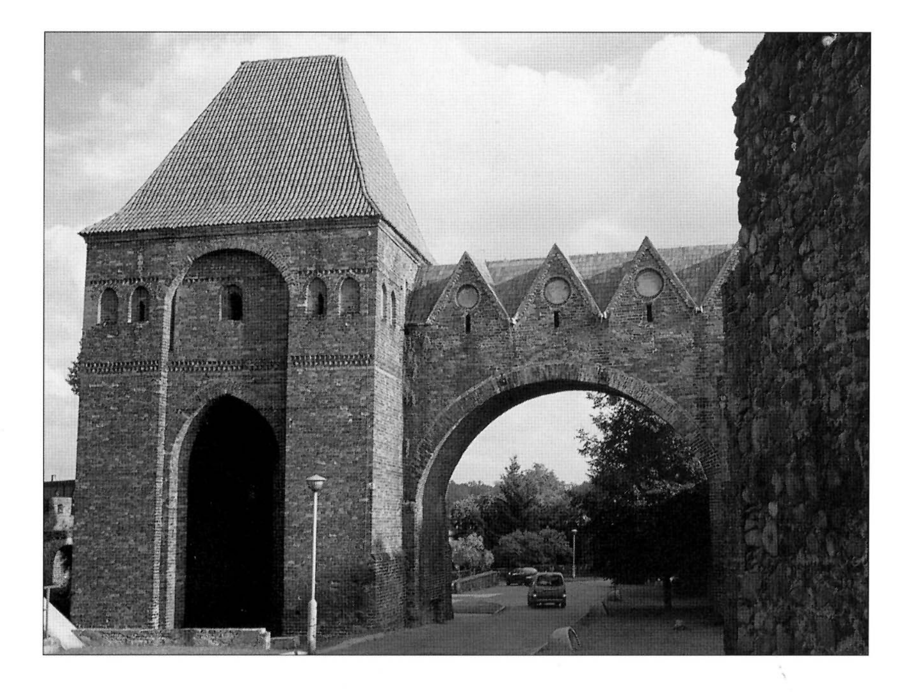
The overall designs of many of the castles show marked similarities. Rather than following the lie of the land the brick castles tended to be built to a

The reconstructed outer defence works of Marienburg (Malbork) are shown here, looking out from a window in one of the towers. The wooden outer cladding to the small tower and the railings on the walkways provides some echo of the origin of the crusader castles as timber outposts.



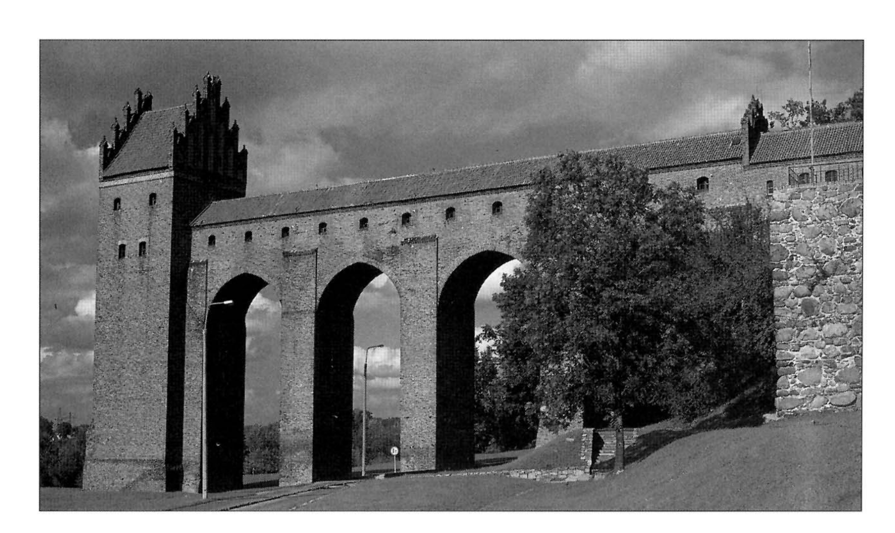
Mewe (Gniew) presents perhaps the finest example of an almost perfectly square castle quadrangle. Its massive six-storey walls pierced by many small windows enclose and dominate a small dark courtyard, and only the three graceful towers that still exist at the corners lighten its prison-like appearance. The remaining corner once displayed a huge main tower that was pulled down in 1857. Unlike other contemporary structures of the Order, the main castle was erected in the centre of a vast outer castle of which few traces remain. The building of Mewe in brick began in 1282.

This example of the *dansk* or sewage tower at Torun, is the largest section of Thorn (Torun) castle to have survived the demolition by its citizens. Unlike Kwidzyn, a stream still runs under the sewage tower and joins the Wisla River.



common plan, from the great Marienburg and Marienwerder down to the simplest frontier fort. This preferred shape was the model of a tower and a fortified quadrangle. The round or square tower keep, almost always located at a corner, contained within its rugged walls the bare essentials of the military and monastic life that could be preserved and defended if all else was lost. Within the tower, or in the square itself, there was always a chapel, a refectory, a dormitory and the commander's chamber. There would also be storage facilities in the cellars. The attached quadrangle was a fortified yard where the kitchen, stables, workshops, armoury and, occasionally, a parish church were located. There might also be an additional outer bailey where refugees could gather with their belongings and herd their cattle in times of war.

One interesting feature of many Prussian castles is the elaborate *dansk*, or sewage (latrine) tower. Some were so big as to be almost castles themselves. Marienburg has two, which are well integrated into the overall design, and one was in fact designed to act as a last tower of refuge during a siege. Thorn has a smaller but typical version where the approach to the latrine tower is conveyed



The finest example of a *dansk* (sewage tower) is this extraordinary edifice at Marienwerder (Kwidzyn), which resembles a Victorian railway viaduct! Entirely built of brick, the *dansk* projects from the remaining castle building and the cathedral complex.

across a three-bayed viaduct to an isolated keep-like structure. Pride of place, however, goes to the incredible Marienwerder, where the latrine tower is reached by a soaring edifice not unlike an English Victorian railway viaduct such as the one at Stockport in Greater Manchester! The tower originally spread its four supports over the river, which is now a good distance away. A model on display within Kwidzyn castle shows how the latrine complex is one of the few structures to have survived from what was originally an enormous fortress. Even today, the bulk of the castle, the adjoining cathedral, the remaining towers and the amazing latrine tower, all of which are located on top of a hill, provide a stunning sight equalled only by Marienburg.

As the roles required of a castle increased during the 14th century so the overall layout of the castle expanded to meet these needs. Other towers might be added, or the quadrangle duplicated to produce a rectangle. Most of the designing and rebuilding was done by imported German architects, whose ingenuity produced fortresses that presented to the outside viewer the impression of soaring cliffs of unscaleable brick topped with machicolations, conical tower roofs and wooden fighting tops.

The construction and decoration of the castles

Building a castle was an expensive undertaking, both in terms of materials and men. Forced labour for digging and carrying could easily be impressed locally, but skilled bricklayers and stonemasons were needed to create strong walls and stately buildings. The Order was handicapped by the fact that the Baltic lands had earned a fearsome reputation as Europe's last frontier, so finding skilled artisans in Germany who were willing to serve in the east cannot have been easy. The financial rewards would also have had to be commensurately great. Not only skilled bricklayers were needed, but also stone carvers for the masonry decoration found throughout the castles, locksmiths, glaziers, carpenters, blacksmiths all had to head east to join with and command the thousands of labourers who dug and carried for them. Soldiers were also needed to guard the vulnerable site while the building work went on.

The rebuilding of Ragnit (Neman in Kaliningrad) shows the processes involved. By 1403 the old earth and wood castle had long since proved its worth and become obsolete, but Ragnit was so important strategically that the site could not simply be levelled to start again. Instead foundations for a new stone and brick fortress were laid, and soon reached a point where the old construction could be safely dispensed with. Engineers brought stone from Königsberg, cut timber locally, baked bricks nearby and shipped in limestone from Gotland to make mortar. Thousands of nails, 5,000lb of white glass and even a few panes of stained glass went into the construction. The work was not completed until 1409, but long before that Ragnit was fully operational as the most modern fortress on the Order's northern frontier. It was a square building in plan with an impressive keep and a *dansk* tower. Ragnit lacked nothing in either comfort or defence.

Several design features of the castles reflected the stark reality of the outside threat that they faced. The windows on the outside of Prussian crusader castles were either very narrow or nonexistent, but the many windows to be found on the safer walls facing into the courtyards compensated for this. Here the light was reflected back from carvings and wall paintings, and glinted off the rich furnishings of the chapels. Some stained glass was used. The result was that from the outside the castles were unmistakable as fortresses. Inside the courtyards there was just enough lightness of detail to remind the Teutonic Knights that they were monks as well as soldiers.

This dual function of the Order was therefore present in its buildings as well, and the elegance of the castles may be noted as much in the fine details as in the overall design. Bas reliefs, carvings and wall paintings gave a beauty and a lightness to the interior of buildings that was conspicuously lacking on the

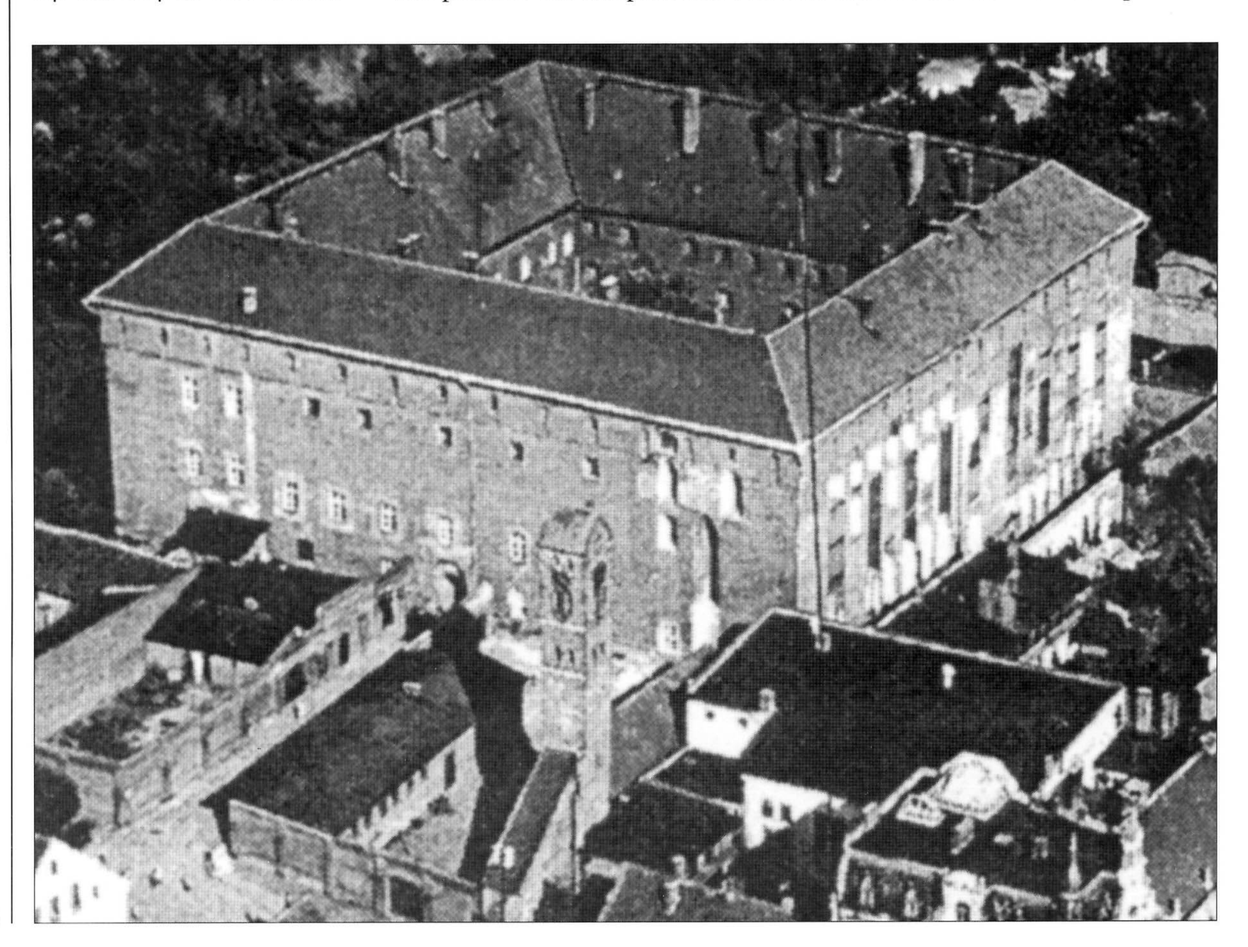
outside. The carvings round the doorways of the chapels of Marienburg are outstanding examples of medieval church decoration. The most famous of these are the carvings round the so-called Golden Gate, the entrance from the cloisters to the main church of the Teutonic Order. Made in the 13th century, the wooden church door is framed with figures of the Wise and Foolish Virgins together with fantastic beasts.

The designs of such carvings were almost always on a biblical or saintly theme, but here and there we see representations of the knights themselves. In Marienburg there are both tournament and battle scenes carved in stone on supporting columns, while Birgelow (Bierzglowo) has a fine bas relief of a knight over the gateway dated to 1305. An exact copy of this may be seen at Malbork. It was added during a subsequent restoration.

In choosing a design theme pride of place was always given to the Blessed Virgin Mary, patroness of the Order. A huge mosaic depicting her (sadly destroyed in 1945) stood outside Marienburg, named in her honour like Marienwerder and Frauenburg, and unexpected Teutonic victories were seen as the miraculous result of her intercessions. Of the male saints chosen as subjects for the wall paintings, warriors such as Sts Sebastian, George, Maurice and Laurence were understandably popular.

Frescoes were also used for decoration, but few examples have survived the years of war and destruction. One example is at Heilsberg (Lidzbark Warminski), a castle of the Warmian bishops who enjoyed the protection of the Order. A medieval wall painting beneath the gallery shows Jesus and Mary offering protection to a bishop climbing up to them. Other frescoes include coats of arms that proclaim the independence from the Order of the Warmian bishops.

Following its rebuilding in 1409 Ragnit (Neman in Kaliningrad) was the most modern fortress on the Order's northern frontier. It was a square building in plan with an impressive keep and a *dansk* tower.

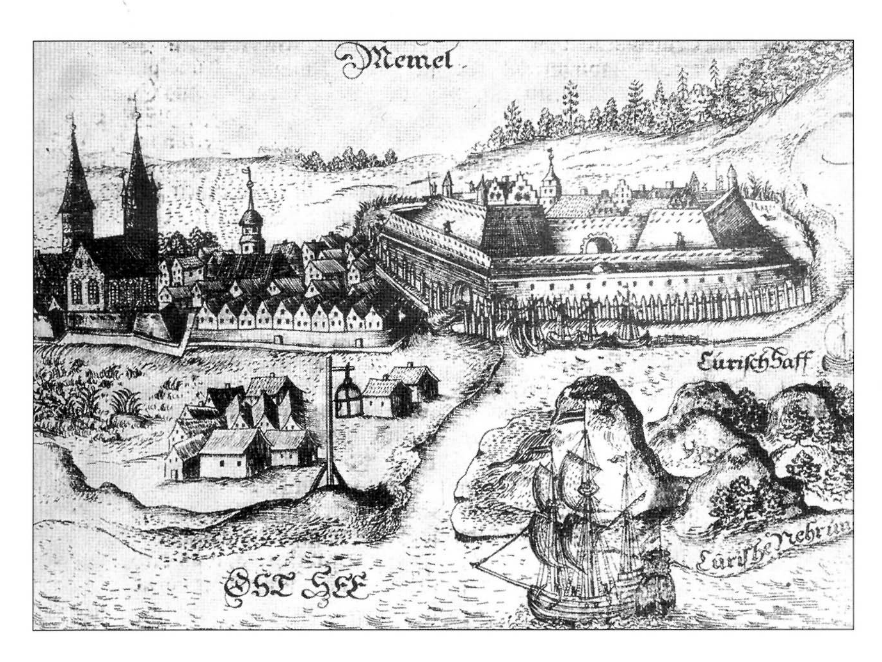


The crusader castle as a defensive system

Control by castles

Castles control, and the most important way they exercise that control is through their location. We have noted earlier how castles such as Marienburg and Elbing were sited on strategic rivers, the main means of communication in medieval Europe. When such a river was a disputed frontier the factor of control by castles became more acute. The river Neman (Nemunas) provided the outstanding example for the situation of the Teutonic Order's Prussian castles. The Neman enters the Courland lagoon, divided from the Baltic by the Courland Spit, and forms the modern border between Kaliningrad and Lithuania. At the most northern point of the Courland Lagoon lay Memel (Klaipeda), the Order's most northerly outpost. Beyond that lay the enemy territory of Samogitia (Zemaitija – Lower Lithuania), which divided the Teutonic Knights of Prussia from their brethren in the Livonian Order. Along the Neman lay Teutonic castles such as Tilsit (Sovetsk) and Ragnit (Neman), but once Ragnit was passed the Neman began to take the Teutonic Knights into the heart of Lithuania.

The most important strategic place up the Neman (Nemunas) was the castle of Kaunas. It lay on a narrow piece of land where the Neris River entered the Nemunas. This was a hotly contested area during the wars between the Order and Lithuania, and successive Grand Dukes had erected fortifications that were very similar in design, and equally impressive in defence to the Teutonic Knights own brick castles. When Kaunas fell to the Order in 1362 it was destroyed, but it was an important strategic site, being only 55 miles from Vilnius, Lithuania's capital. So 1384 was to find Grand Master Zolner von Rothenstein spending the summer rebuilding Kaunas and creating a new fortress, which he named Marienwerder after one of the principal Prussian castles. The Lithuanians did not intend to allow such a foothold to be established and attacked Marienwerder



The castle of Memel (now Klaipeda in Lithuania), the most northerly of the crusader castles of Teutonic Prussia. Beyond Memel lay the coastal strip of Samogitia (Zemaitija – Lower Lithuania), which separated the Prussian castles from those of their brethren in the Livonian Branch of the Order.

(Kaunas) with some of the first artillery to be seen in the Lithuanian campaigns. They floated the cannons down the Neris from Vilnius and captured Marienwerder (Kaunas) in six weeks.

Brick walls and crossbows

The underlying principle behind the defence of a particular Prussian fortress was that a small garrison in a strong brick castle should be able to hold off an enemy until help arrived, so each castle was required to store supplies for two years of continual siege. No castle was more than a day's march away from the next one, so relief should never be long in coming. All that was required was for the garrison to hang on long enough for the besiegers to be driven away.

The development of the brick crusader castles represented an attempt to create a defensive system that would withstand increasingly sophisticated forms and techniques of siege weaponry as the years passed. The use of brick provided a strong building material that could stand up to trebuchets and, eventually, artillery bombardment. With this as a guiding principle siege defences were 'designed in' to the overall scheme. First, the approach to a castle was made so that an attacker could be observed at every stage. When he finally launched an attack he was faced with sheer brick walls and massive gates. The main gate to the quadrangle was always defended from inside a formidable gatehouse behind a drawbridge. If the courtyard was lost, the garrison could withdraw into the tower and keep assailants at bay with crossbows. Even the detached sewage tower that is found at most sites could provide a last line of defence. Finally, as a brick castle had strong foundations it would take an attacker many days of effort to use the alternative approach of tunnelling under such a strong structure and undermining it. The location of another brick castle a day's march away was also a disincentive to lengthy mining operations.

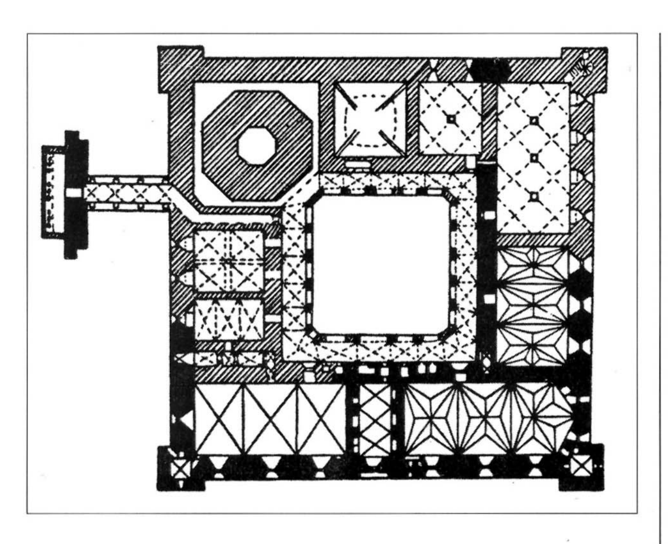
In addition to the walls and towers themselves, a garrison armed with and skilled at using various anti-personnel weapons defended the Prussian castles. Long before gunpowder weapons were available the crusader castle defensive system depended upon the combination of timber and then brick walls with numerous crossbows, the brothers' favourite weapons. Crossbows had a longer range and greater hitting power than the bows of the Prussians. The Teutonic Knights always preferred the crossbow to the longbow, even though yew wood for making both types was an export item from Prussia. In the inventory of Ragnit castle in 1396 we note the presence of 7,600 unworked pieces of wood for bows, and a further 1,150 for crossbows.

Crossbows were so formidable that their use had been condemned by the Second Lateran Council in 1139 as being 'deadly and hated by God'. However, the Church permitted them to be used against non-Christians, and the pagan Prussians fitted very conveniently into that category. During the 13th century the wooden bow was starting to be replaced by a composite crossbow of billy-goat horn, sinew and wood, fitted with a stirrup for ease of drawing, but simpler types continued in use. Steel crossbows gained ground only very slowly in the Baltic lands because of fears that the bows would break in cold weather. Horn crossbows, by contrast, became about a third stronger in cold conditions, and the later preponderance of steel crossbows in the Order's armouries was partly due to the fact that they could be produced more cheaply. By 1410 the Order probably possessed about 4,500 crossbows and over 1,000,000 bolts in Prussia alone. Every second or third man in its armies was equipped with a crossbow, and good foreign crossbowmen such as the Genoese were among the most sought after mercenaries.

Catapults and cannon

Catapults, initially of the traction trebuchet type, were used both offensively and defensively during the campaigns against the early Prussian fortresses, but the most important step forward in siege warfare was the introduction of the

counterweight trebuchet. These monsters had already destroyed the Teutonic Knights' original home at Acre in 1291 and could deliver a massive payload compared to the traction-operated version, but they took a long time to set up and were slow to operate. Nevertheless, if an army had the opportunity and the resources to conduct a siege using counterweight trebuchets, even brick castles were extremely vulnerable.



Plan of the castle of Reden (Radzyn Chelminski) showing the typical square arrangement for the brick crusader castles. Note the passage through to the *dansk* (latrine tower).

It was therefore fortunate for the Order that massive trebuchets were brought up against their walls only very rarely, and the early part of the 14th century, when Prussians and Lithuanians were their main enemies, saw the brick castles dominate the practice of siege warfare as much as they dominated the countryside. But technology was developing all the time, and the first reliable mention of firearms being used by the Teutonic Knights occurs in a chronicle describing a siege in 1362. In the 1380s the pattern of warfare around the Prussian castles changed again with the introduction of cannon, which first appeared on crusade in the winter campaign of 1381. During the truce that followed the Order gave a bombard to Jogaila of Lithuania, who was soon to become King Wladislaw Jagiello of Poland, and when the truce expired the Lithuanians used them against the Teutonic Knights.

In 1384 Grand Master Zöllner von Rothenstein attempted to build a new brick castle at Kaunas named Marienwerder after its counterpart in Prussia. The Lithuanian castles were located upriver from the Teutonic strongpoints, and as river transport was the only practical means of moving heavy cannon from place to place across the forested and swampy terrain, this meant that Lithuanian artillery could more easily bombard the Knights' castles than the reverse. Kaunas was no exception, because Vilnius lay upstream from it on the river Neris. The Lithuanians floated cannon down the river and Marienwerder (Kaunas) fell in spite of the fact that the garrison had cannon of their own that were well used. Trebuchets were also used in the siege and one counter-battery shot from a Teutonic cannon put a Lithuanian trebuchet out of action by smashing its counterweight 'like an egg'.

A further example of artillery being used to expand the Prussian fortress line occurs in 1385 when Zöllner von Rothenstein found himself opposed at a river crossing by Jogaila's brother. His opponent had set up a field position 'with innumerable bombards'. Three years later in 1388 the same Teutonic commander was repulsed from a Lithuanian castle by artillery.

From this time onwards gunpowder weapons became a factor in the design and defence of the crusader castles, though at this point siege artillery was not as effective as it would become a century later, mainly due to the difficulties of transportation. The need to drag heavy siege guns along almost nonexistent roads or barge them along rivers meant that in several actions of the 15th century the artillery was simply left behind. As a result the defensive system presented by the formidable-looking brick crusader castles was not necessarily as strong as it looked, because it was seldom tested.

As for cannon production, we know that from at least the beginning of the 15th century the bell founders of Marienburg were set to work casting cannon barrels using the lost wax process, and between 1399 and 1409 there was a steady production of Teutonic artillery. The manufacture of gunpowder, a vital but highly risky business, was entrusted to the bell founders' wives in Danzig and Elbing. The powder mixers were sometimes brought to Marienburg to produce a special order.

Typical crusader castles of Prussia

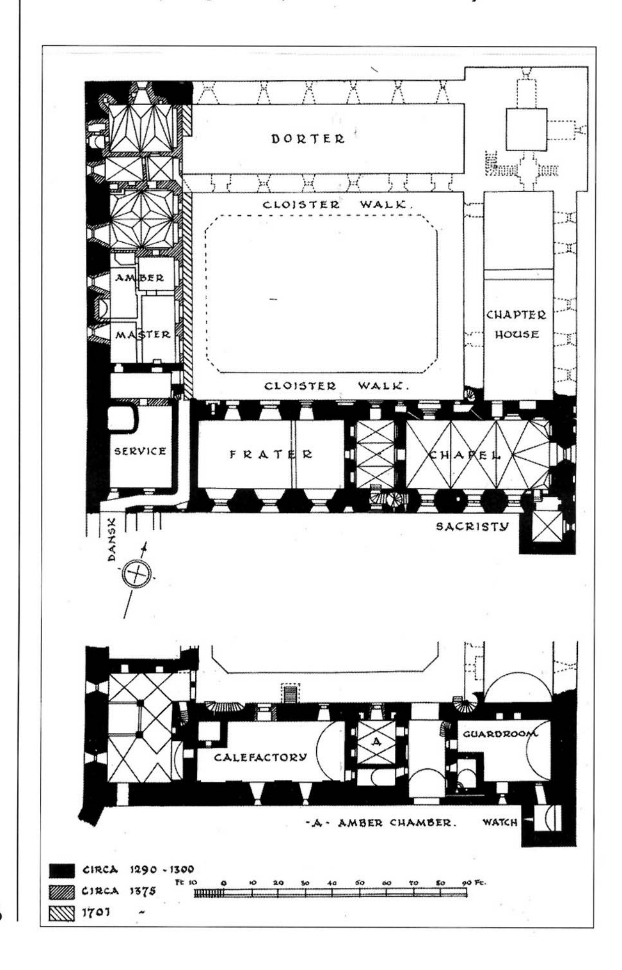
The surviving crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights range from enormous restored fortresses such as Marienburg down to simple overgrown grassy mounds with the occasional pile of bricks protruding above ground. In between these extremes are several castles in fairly good states of repair, and numerous drawings and prints survive to fill in the gaps in the record.

The castle of the Amber Master

The castle of Lochstädt presents an interesting and fairly typical example of the smaller type of red-brick crusader castle. Although very little of it now remains, a thorough archaeological examination undertaken in 1934 left numerous records and the following description is based on the published results.

Lochstädt castle was built in a strategically important position, being located on the spit of land that projects out to protect the Frisches Haff. This was the sea approach to Königsberg (Kaliningrad). The castle stood on the north side of the narrow channel that then provided the gateway to Königsberg from the Baltic. The modern channel is now further to the west. Lochstädt was built as a timber castle in 1270 and was reconstructed in brick during the late-13th century. A commander is first recorded at Lochstädt in 1305, but the castle's standing was downgraded following the acquisition of Pomerania, which shifted the centre of gravity of the Prussian state further to the west. The silting up of the nearby channel also made Lochstädt's strategic role less important and it was eventually abandoned.

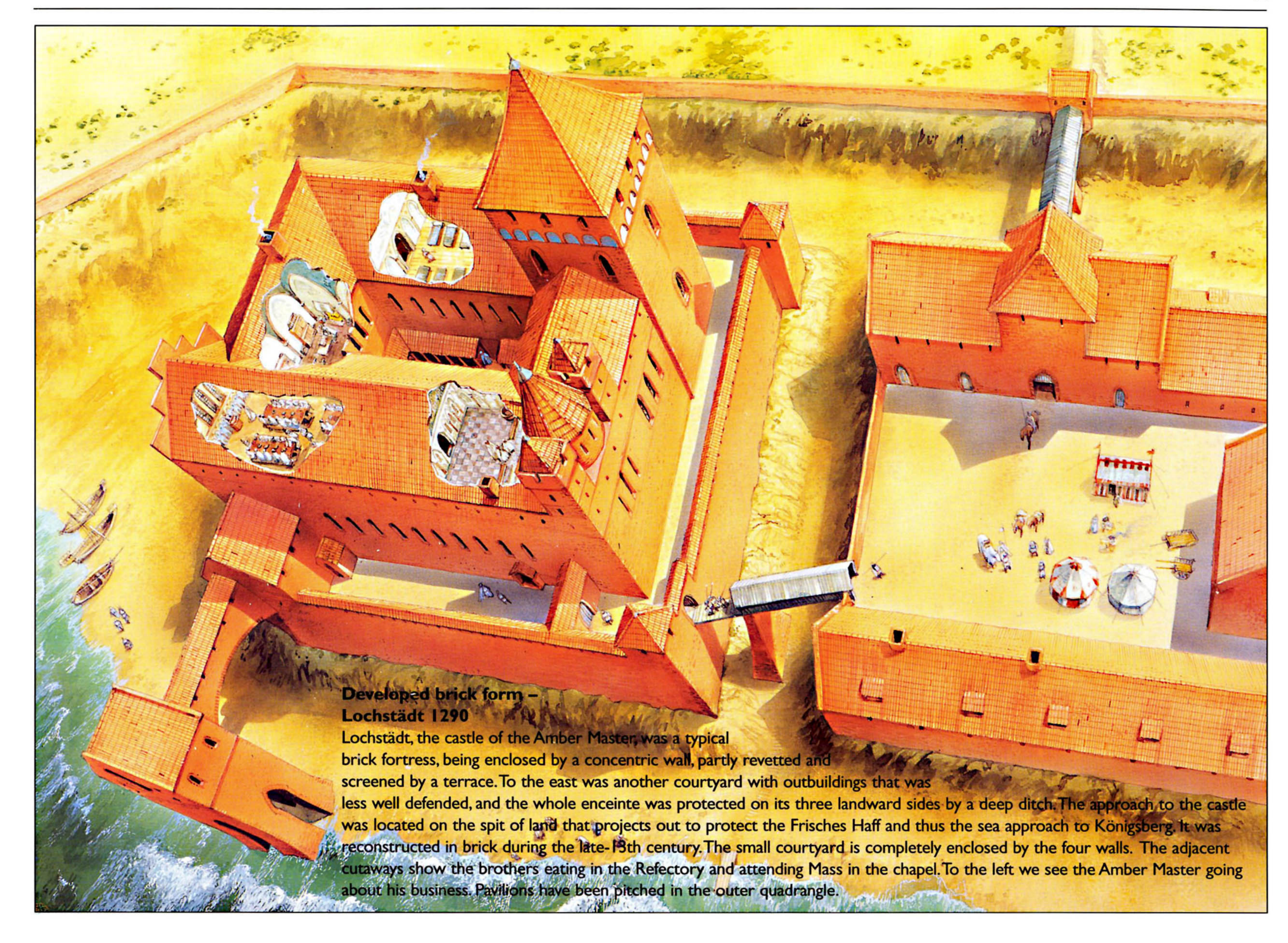
Floor plan of Lochstädt castle, the castle of the Amber Master. The lower plan is of the ground floor, while the upper plan shows the first floor with the bridge leading over to the *dansk* (sewage tower).



As well as its military role, Lochstädt had some commercial importance, because it was built at a place where fragments of amber were regularly deposited on the seashore by submarine erosion. Amber is the treasure of the Baltic, so Lochstädt therefore housed the most unusual official of the Teutonic Order in the person of the *Bernsteinmeister*, or Amber Master, who supervised the collection of the amber and forwarded it to Königsberg to be worked upon.

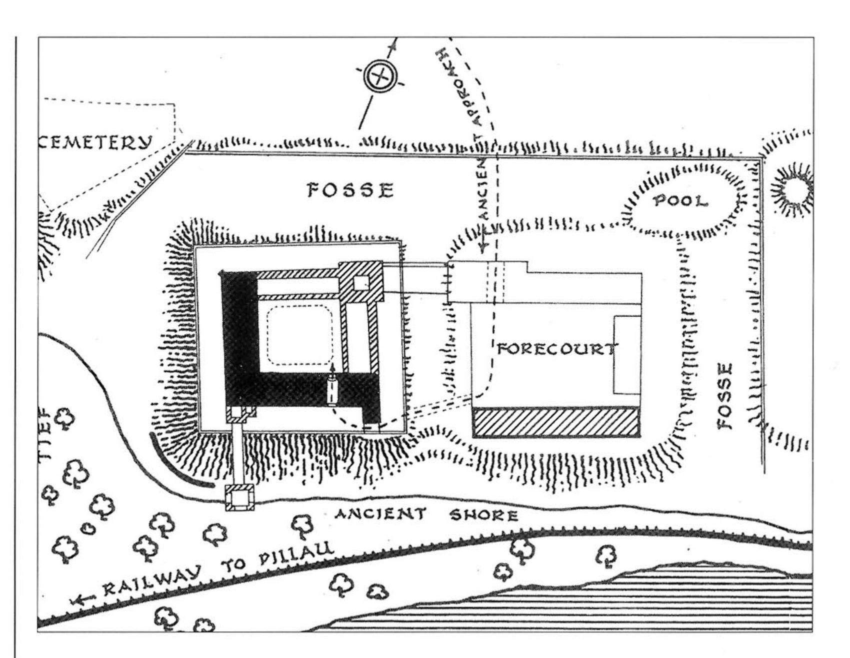
The castle of Lochstädt was built from brick resting on a foundation of massive coursed granite boulders. The archaeological report states that the bricks averaged 1ft by 5¾in. by 3½in., and were laid in what was known as Gothic texture with fairly open joints. Some of the decorative features of the castle were carved in granite, sandstone or limestone, while others were produced by having the detail cut into the dry clay before firing.

Lochstädt was built on a bluff 70ft high overlooking the waters of the Frisches Haff, which lapped at its foundations. The main quadrangle of Lochstädt was square, with high-pitched roofs over two-storey buildings on each side and a strong square tower in the north-east corner. The ground floor of the southern wing housed the porter's lodge, a guardroom and a small prison, and, next to it, was the so-called 'amber room'. The chapel lay at the eastern end of the first floor of the southern side. In 1375 the west wing was completed to provide the Amber



Developed brick form – Lochstädt 1290

Lochstädt, the castle of the Amber Master, was a typical brick fortress, being enclosed by a concentric wall, partly revetted and screened by a terrace. To the east was another courtyard with outbuildings that was less well defended, and the whole enceinte was protected on its three landward sides by a deep ditch. The approach to the castle was located on the spit of land that projects out to protect the Frisches Haff and thus the sea approach to Königsberg. It was reconstructed in brick during the late-13th century. The small courtyard is completely enclosed by the four walls. The adjacent cutaways show the brothers eating in the Refectory and attending Mass in the chapel. To the left we see the Amber Master going about his business. Pavilions have been pitched in the outer quadrangle.



The overall plan of Lochstädt castle. The main quadrangle of Lochstädt was square, with high-pitched roofs over two-storey buildings on each side and a strong square tower in the northeast corner. The ground floor of the southern wing housed the porter's lodge, a guardroom and a small prison, and next to it was the so-called 'amber room'. The chapel lay at the eastern end of the first floor of the southern side. In 1375 the west wing was completed to provide the Amber Master's quarters, and housed storerooms beneath.

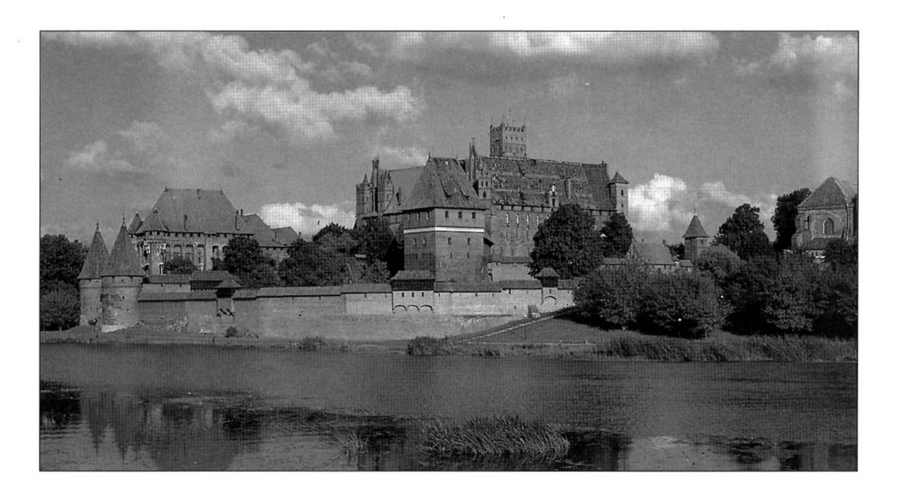
Master's quarters, and housed storerooms beneath. Leading from a door out of the first floor of the south wing was the passageway leading to the *dansk*, the detached sewage or latrine tower. Human waste fell from the tower directly into the sea. The whole of the main castle was enclosed by a concentric wall, partly revetted and screened by a terrace. To the east was another less well defended courtyard with outbuildings and the whole *enceinte* was protected on its three landward sides by a deep ditch.

The approach to the castle was designed according to the best defensive principles. The path first passed through a gate in the north side of the eastern bailey and then via a diagonally situated bridge towards the main courtyard where the entrance could be covered from the main tower. This led into the narrow space between the inner quadrangle and the outer wall, to enter next to the guardroom. The final stage was overlooked from the connecting passage to the *dansk* tower. A heavy door defended the entrance.

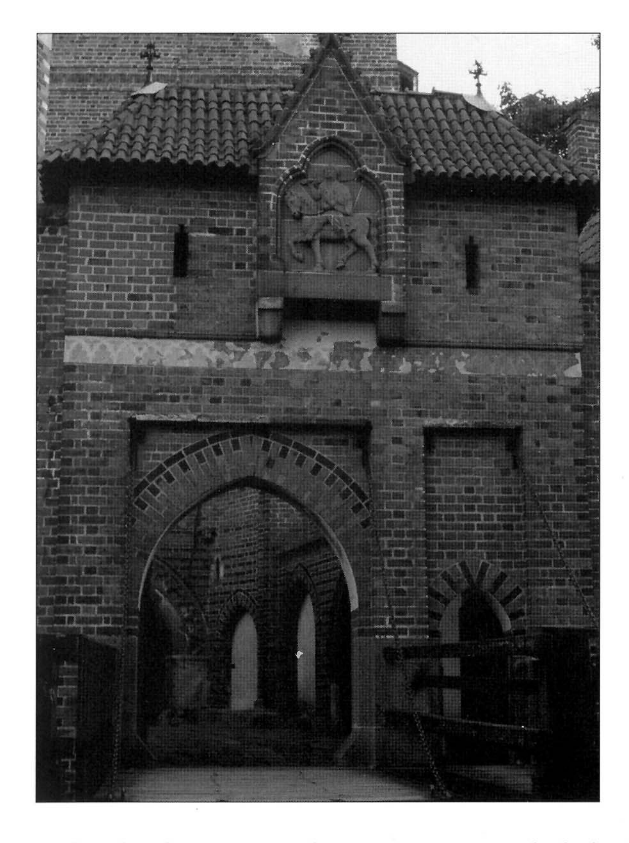
From the records of the Königsberg commandery we know that Lochstädt would have held a total garrison of about 60 men, including the Amber Master (who is mentioned as late as 1437) one priest-brother and between ten and 20 knights. An inventory of Lochstädt's kitchen in 1429 includes stores of herrings, cod, mutton, pork and sausages, and over 5,000 cheeses. The economy of Lochstädt was built on dairy farming as much as it was on collecting amber.

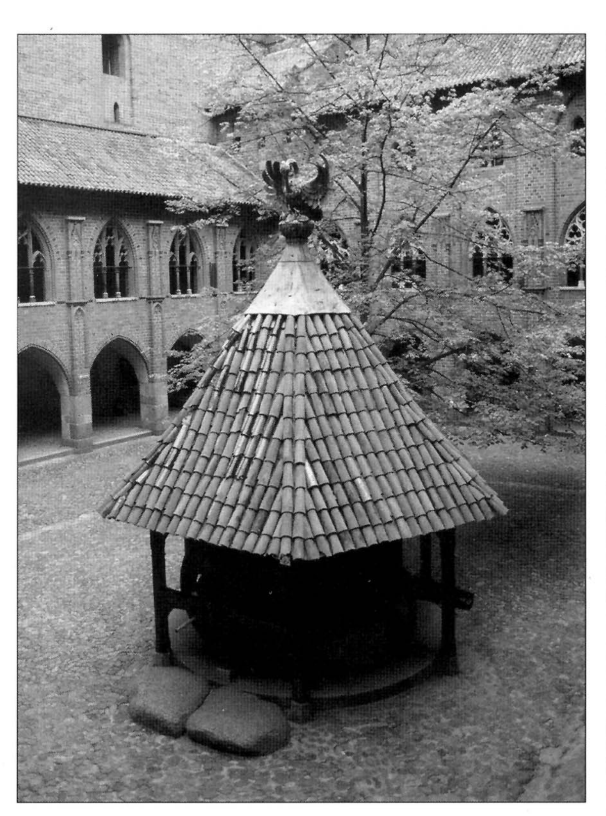
Marienburg the great

From modest Lochstädt we move to the largest and finest edifice of the Teutonic Knights, which was, and still is, the magnificent Marienburg. Now called Malbork, it lies on the banks of the River Nogat, which frames a stunning and almost unspoiled view of a masterpiece of medieval military architecture. Almost every aspect and feature of the Prussian castle, from its use of brick to its experience of siege warfare, may be found in Marienburg, which was a



This view of Marienburg is taken at an angle from the south-west looking across from the river Nogat. The massive bulk of the High Castle with its fine tower appears strikingly on the horizon. The large building to the left is the palace of the Grand Master in the Middle Castle.





castle, a headquarters, a palace, a monastery and a holy city all rolled into one. It was a feast for the senses and a profound statement of religious and secular power. The Sire de Lannoy, who visited it in 1412, reported that Marienburg contained arms and supplies to maintain a garrison of 1,000 men for ten years, or 10,000 for one year. He was but one of many foreign visitors, most of whom went there to take part as 'guest crusaders' in the Order's notorious forays into Lithuania, and in most cases the first impression that a visitor was given of the power of the Order was the sight of marvellous Marienburg.

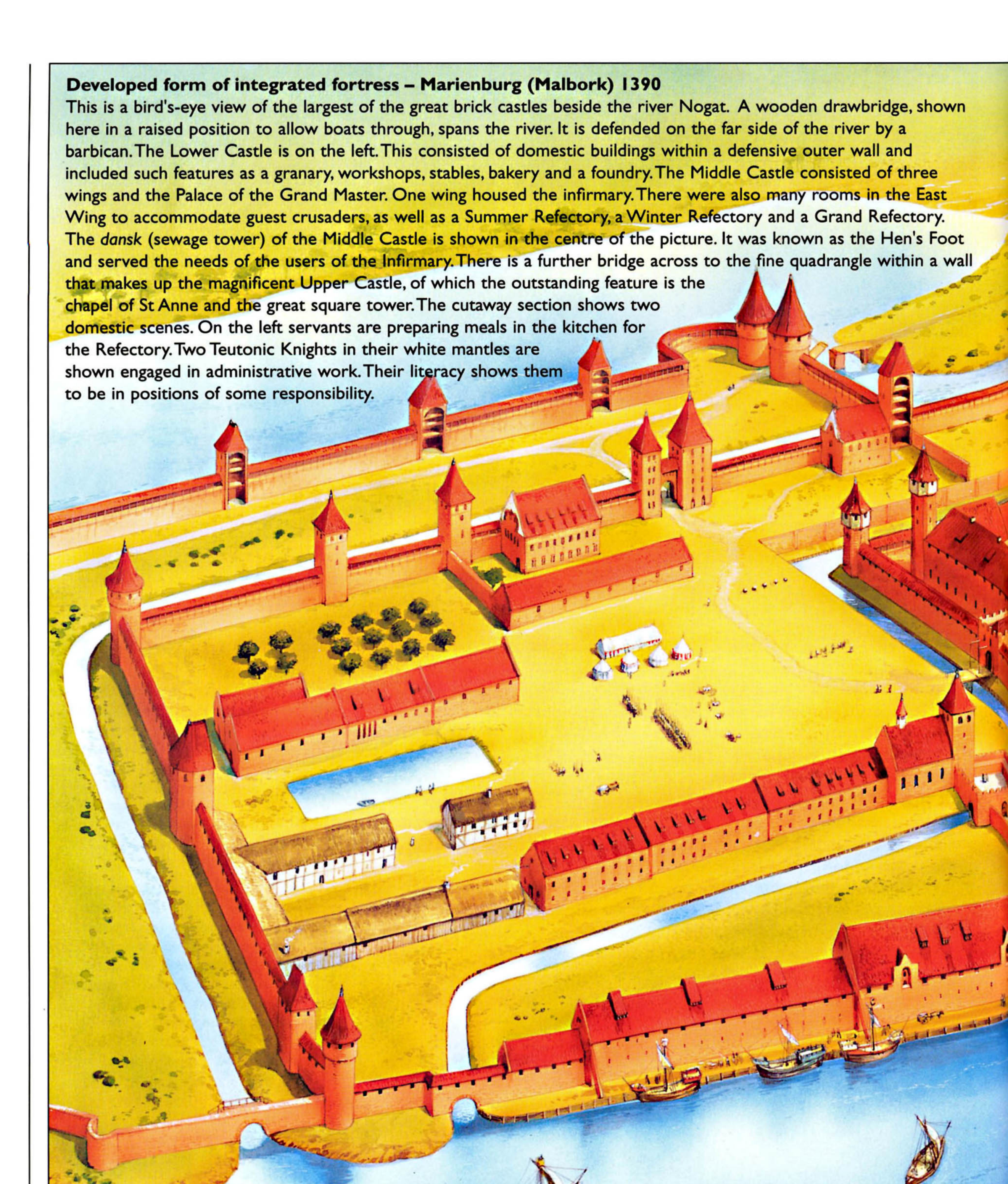
The guidebooks to Malbork (one of the tourist gems of modern Poland) claim that Marienburg was the largest medieval castle in Europe. It consists of three main sections: the Lower, Middle and High castles. The High Castle marks the site of the original foundation and the Middle Castle was built over the former outer bailey when the Order's headquarters were transferred from Venice in 1309. The original chapel was transformed into the main church of the Order in Prussia and took on a new and exceptional beauty. At the same time military requirements led to the building of the first permanent bridge over the River Nogat. This no longer exists, but the two gate towers that defended it still stand.

The Middle Castle consisted of three wings and the Palace of the Grand Master. One wing housed the infirmary. There were also many rooms in the East Wing to accommodate guest crusaders, as well as a Summer Refectory, a Winter Refectory and a Grand Refectory. The approach to the Middle Castle was defended by a multiple gate and a portcullis. There are two *dansk* towers, the smaller one, known as the Hen's Foot, serving the infirmary.

The Lower Castle included such features as a granary, workshops, stables, bakery and a foundry. One building in the Lower Castle is now a hotel. Much of the outer fabric has survived or been restored, most of it very well indeed, and a walk round the outside shows an interesting contrast between the defences on the river side and the land walls.

ABOVE LEFT The drawbridge and gateway leading from the Middle Castle of Marienburg (Malbork) to the High Castle. A fine bas-relief of a Teutonic Knight on his horse appears over the doorway. This is a copy of the relief that appears over the portal of Birgelow (Bierzglowo) castle, dated to 1305.

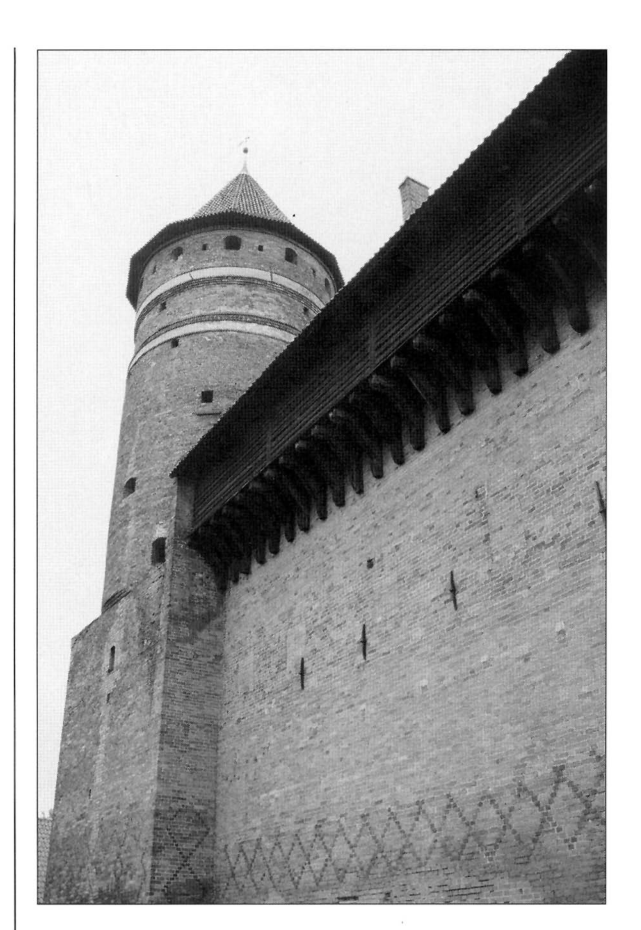
ABOVE RIGHT The inner courtyard of the High Castle of Marienburg (Malbork) showing the covered well, which ensured a supply of water for the castle. It is surmounted by a roof, on top of which is a heraldic figure of a pelican 'vulning' itself, i.e. making blood flow from its breast to feed its young, an allegory of the Virgin Mary.



Developed form of integrated fortress – Marienburg (Malbork) 1390

This is a bird's-eye view of the largest of the great brick castles beside the river Nogat. A wooden drawbridge, shown here in a raised position to allow boats through, spans the river. It is defended on the far side of the river by a barbican. The Lower Castle is on the left. This consisted of domestic buildings within a defensive outer wall and included such features as a granary, workshops, stables, bakery and a foundry. The Middle Castle consisted of three wings and the Palace of the Grand Master. One wing housed the infirmary. There were also many rooms in the East Wing to accommodate guest crusaders, as well as a Summer Refectory, a Winter Refectory and a Grand Refectory. The *dansk* (sewage tower) of the Middle Castle is shown in the centre of the picture. It was known as the Hen's Foot and served the needs of the users of the Infirmary. There is a further bridge across to the fine quadrangle within a wall that makes up the magnificent Upper Castle, of which the outstanding feature is the chapel of St Anne and the great square tower. The cutaway section shows two domestic scenes. On the left servants are preparing meals in the kitchen for the Refectory. Two Teutonic Knights in their white mantles are shown engaged in administrative work. Their literacy shows them to be in positions of some responsibility.





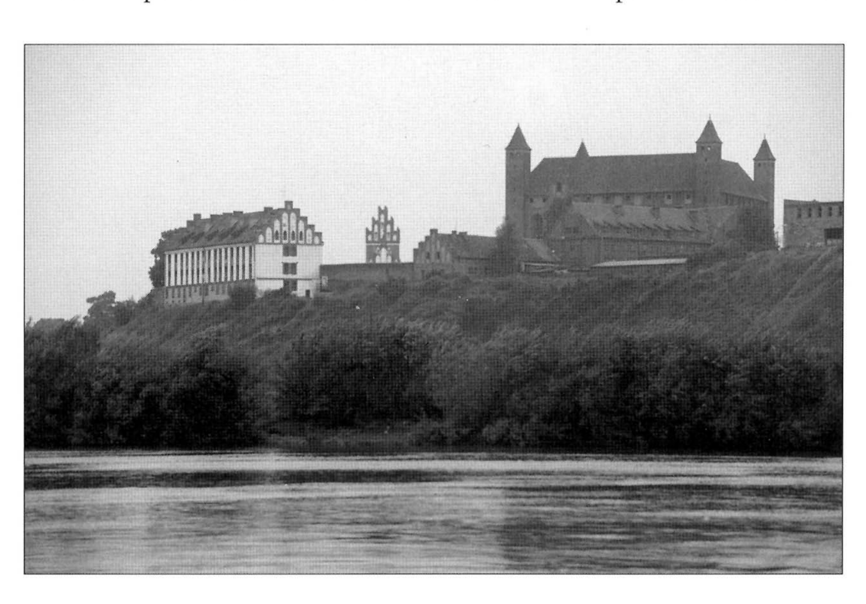
The castle of Allenstein (Olsztyn), constructed between 1350 and 1359, is an excellent example of the Prussian style. It has a huge round tower, while the projecting south-west wing with a decorated end and wooden fighting tops make it look like a fortified cathedral with hardly any windows.

Other representative crusader castles

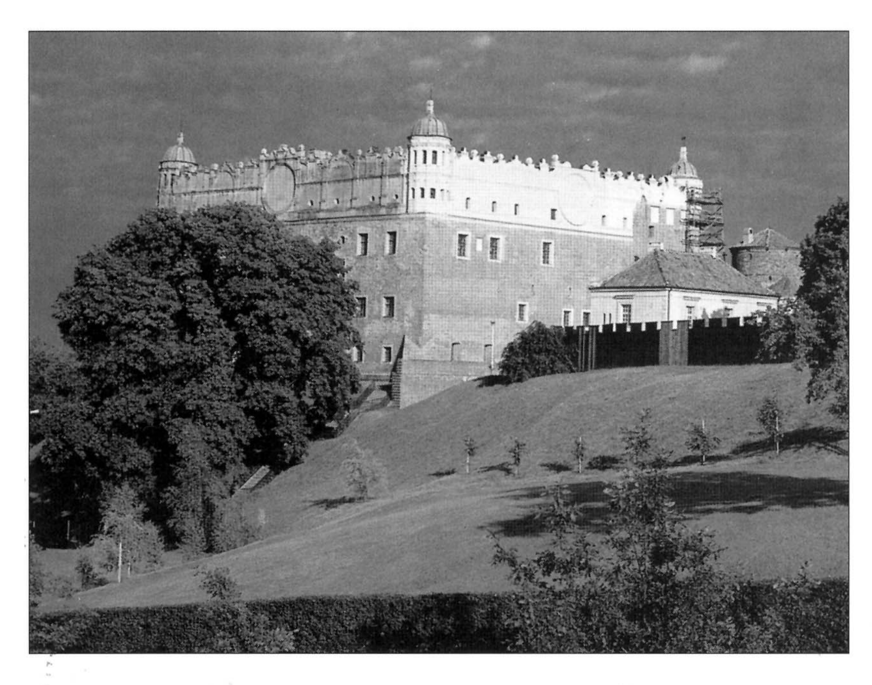
In between the windswept and forgotten site of Lochstädt and the splendours of restored Marienburg lies a feast of military architecture. Few existing specimens of Prussian castles have survived completely untouched by later additions or demolition, but in most cases it is relatively easy to restore the fortress using one's imagination. Allenstein (Olsztyn), constructed between 1350 and 1359, is an excellent example of a castle midway in size between Lochstädt and Marienburg. It has a huge round tower, while the projecting southwest wing with a decorated end and wooden fighting tops make it look like a fortified cathedral with hardly any windows. The outer walls are sheer cliffs of smooth red brick which no attacker could climb. From inside the courtyard its appearance is softer, with doors and delicate cloister-like windows on the first floor, but the whole courtyard is fully enclosed within massive walls.

Mewe (Gniew) presents perhaps the finest example of an almost perfectly square castle quadrangle. Its massive six-storey walls pierced by many small windows enclose and dominate a small dark courtyard, and only the three graceful towers that still exist at the corners lighten its prison-like appearance. The remaining corner once displayed a huge main tower, which was pulled down in 1857. Unlike other contemporary structures of the Order, the main castle was erected at the centre of a vast outer castle of which few traces remain. The building of Mewe in brick began in 1282.

Another of the earliest brick castles, which survives today in a splendidly ruined state, is Reden (Radzyn Chelminski) which guarded Kulmerland from the east. The first castle of timber was built there in 1234, and it was rebuilt in brick at the end of the 13th century. It was partly devastated in 1410, but its ruins still show signs of a high level of artistry in a fortress built when military needs were paramount. Here and there we see the use of patterned brick for no



The castle of Mewe (Gniew) as seen from the Vistula (Wisla) River. The predominantly white building on the left is the Marysienski Palace, added on by King Jan Sobieski in the 17th century.

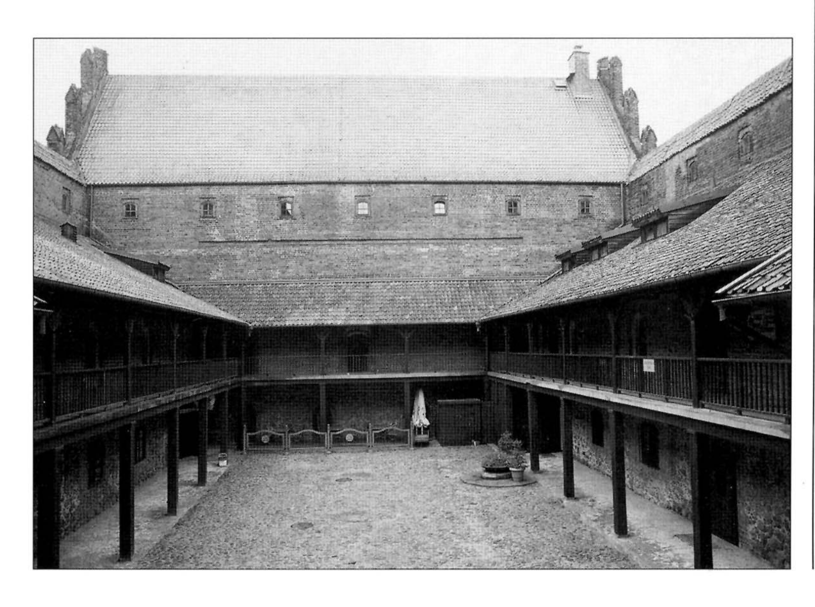


The castle of Gollub (Golub-Dobrzyn) is a little later than Reden, its brick structure replacing timber only in 1310. It must have resembled Reden and Mewe quite closely until being radically altered and transformed into a palace at the beginning of the 17th century. It now houses an interesting historical museum.

other reason than decoration, a feature that adds to the confidence expressed by the overall building. Its windows are typically tall and narrow, making the whole place look like a fortified church. For a short period of time Reden was defended by Czech mercenaries under the command of Jan Zizka, the future hero of the Hussite Wars.

Nearby Gollub (Golub-Dobrzyn) is a little later than Reden, its brick structure replacing timber only in 1310. It must have resembled Reden and Mewe quite closely until being radically altered and transformed into a palace at the beginning of the 17th century. This gave it the rather unbalanced addition of a top storey constructed of stone.

The castle of Neidenburg (Nidzica) was begun in 1380, at a time when the Prussian crusade was almost over and the notion of 'castle as monastery' was beginning to be superseded by the concept of a 'castle as a protector of trade routes'. As Neidenburg covered important road eastwards towards Lithuania and had no episcopal connections, this late foundation gives the impression of a castle that is more a magnate's residence than a fortified monastery. On its shorter side is a wing that looks like a church, but in fact the chapel only occupies one-third of the space. There is an attractive courtyard with simple wooden galleries rather than graceful monastic cloisters, and across this yard are two tremendous towers enclosing a gatehouse that protrudes forwards from the walls. In place of the latrine tower of Marienwerder there are simple projecting latrines like garderobes. The whole complex, which sits squarely on a hill, was protected by a deep moat and exudes an impression of strength and confidence.



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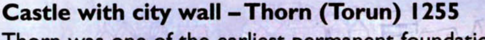
The walls of Kulm (Chelmno). The castle, of which only fragments now remain, was rebuilt as a possession of the Order in 1232. Much of the encircling red-brick wall has survived and is an important feature of present-day Chelmno.

The castle and the town

As noted earlier, the links between the Prussian crusader castles and Germanic urban commercial life were very important. Closely related to the programme of castle building, both conceptually and physically, was the erection of the other public buildings that made a Prussian castle into the centre of a community. As the community expanded each new parish was securely walled in using the same style of red-brick fortification, creating a unity of style between military and more domestic architecture. These are more noticeable in towns, because the villages that once surrounded isolated fortresses have disappeared even more thoroughly than the castles themselves.



A model of the city of Torun, looking from north to south. In the top left-hand corner may be seen the ruins of Thorn (Torun) castle beside the Vistula (Wisla). A prominent ditch divides the New Town (to the left) from the Old Town (to the right) in the middle of which may be seen the outline of the Town Hall.



Castle with city wall – Thorn (Torun) 1255

Thorn was one of the earliest permanent foundations and was a brick castle integrated with a city wall utilising the defence provided by the river. The buildings were very elaborate, and the conjoined *dansk* (latrine tower) is shown. This gives a good example of the developed form of fortified town. There is a careful use made for defensive purposes of the streams that feed into the river. Because of the total destruction visited on the castle the reconstruction of the details is highly speculative, but the pattern of the walls of the castle and of the city is confirmed by what remains.

A view of the town of Grudziadz from across the Wisla. Along the slope of the ridge leading down from the castle are no less than 26 granaries, some of seven storeys in height. They were built during the 15th century out of the same red brick that was used for the crusader castle of Graudenz (Grudziadz) on top of the hill.



There are several places in Poland where the medieval layout of town and castle can be easily discerned. Kulm (Chelmno) provides an early example, but only fragments of the castle have survived within its fine encircling walls. Similarly the university city of Torun has the best-preserved town wall of all the Teutonic settlements, but little remains of its castle, the foundation known as Thorn. Thorn castle lies in romantic ruins, as it has done since the citizens of the town demolished it so enthusiastically in 1454, but the wall leading from it still extends impressively along the river bank. There is also one of the best-preserved *dansk* towers in Poland. In the city the Monastery Gate and the Harbour Gate are interesting features, as is the 'Leaning Tower of Thorn', which owes its crookedness to its clay base. A colourful legend tells us that a Teutonic Knight deliberately built it in this way as a penance for a drunken spree!

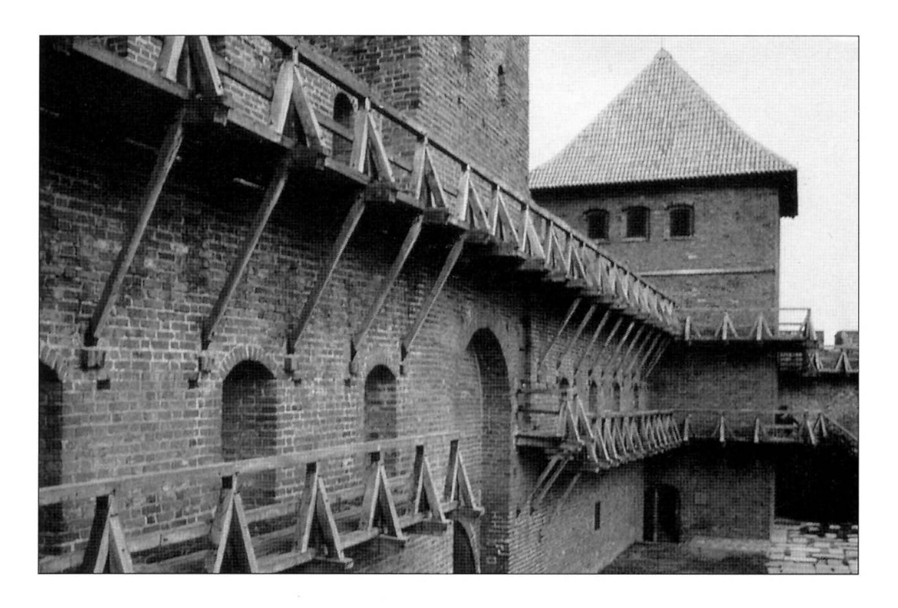
A town linked to a well-established castle could enjoy very considerable wealth, as is shown today by the example of Graudenz (Grudziadz). Along the slope of the ridge leading down from the castle are no less than 26 granaries, some of seven storeys in height. They were built during the 15th century out of the same red brick that was used for the crusader castle on top of the hill. Similar granaries exist in Thorn.

One other way in which the disciplined and ordered lives of the Teutonic Knights in their castles permeated down to the citizens of the towns was through their use of clocks. The primary purpose of the clocks was to regulate the hours for prayer so that the bells could be rung on time. Mechanical clocks were introduced, and some castle towers even acquired clock faces.

Castles and cathedrals

Because of the brothers' dual roles as monks and knights, most of the surviving Prussian castles have a clear association with a particular ecclesiastical building, which in many cases began life as the brothers' chapel originally built into the fabric of the castle. At Marienwerder (Kwidzyn), for example, today's Kwidzyn cathedral and the massive castle are part of the same complex.

There is also a remarkable unity of style between castle and cathedral. The builders both of castles and churches tended to emphasise two simple shapes: the rectangle and the triangle. This ensures that the ecclesiastical buildings show the same economy and directness as a castle. Their towers proclaim their presence to the surrounding countryside, while their stepped, patterned and turreted gables, also found on the castle chapels, visibly proclaimed the Order's wealth to the citizens.



Frauenburg, which is now called Frombork, lies north-east of Elbing along the coast of the Frisches Haff. In about 1278 the bishops of the Warmia Chapter decided to abandon their seat at Braunsberg (Braniewo), which was exposed to frequent Prussian attacks. Between 1329 and 1388 a magnificent fortified cathedral was built at Frauenberg. It is surrounded by massive castle walls that integrate Frauenberg castle and Frauenberg cathedral.

The most interesting example of the combination of church and castle may be found at Frauenburg, which is now called Frombork. It lies north-east of Elbing along the coast of the Frisches Haff. In about 1278 the bishops of the Warmia Chapter decided to abandon their seat at Braunsberg (Braniewo) which was exposed to numerous Prussian attacks. Between 1329 and 1388 a magnificent fortified cathedral was built at Frauenberg. It is surrounded by massive castle walls that resemble Olsztyn. The defensive needs meant that Frauenberg castle and Frauenberg cathedral were completely integrated. Being in such a strategic location the Frauenberg fortifications were kept in good order, and loopholes for firearms were added during the 16th century.

Strictly speaking, the castle of Frauenberg did not belong to the Teutonic Order, but to the diocese of Warmia. In 1243 the Papal Legate William of Modena divided Prussia into four dioceses: Chelmno, Pomezania, Warmia and Sambia. The Pope's act stated that the Order would own two-thirds of each diocese and one-third was granted to the bishops, but Warmia maintained a lively independence. The castle was nonetheless fully integrated into the Order's defensive system, as were two other castles in the east that were possessions of the Warmian bishops.

The first of these was Heilsberg (Lidzbark Warminski), one of the best preserved of all the Prussian crusader castles. In 1251 the Order gave the site to the bishops of the Warmian diocese, and the splendid brick castle was built between 1350 and 1401. It resembles Reden and Mewe in overall appearance, having Mewe's solid bulk yet spreading this over two adjoining square courtyards. There are four residential wings, four towers and one massive central tower. Inside are attractive two-storey arcades making a cloistered gallery.

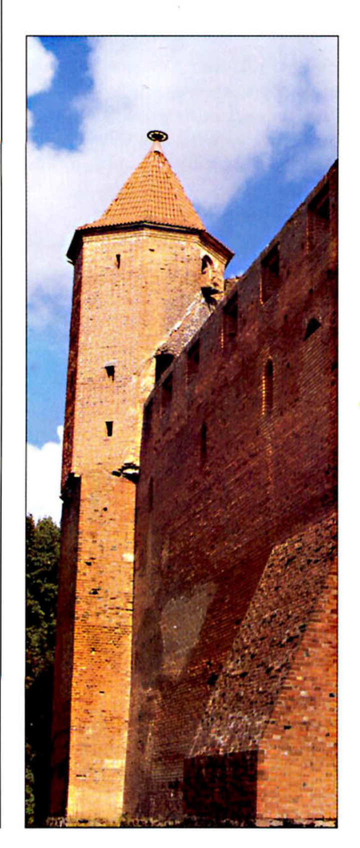
A second residence of the Warmian bishops may be found further to the east at Rössel (Reszel). The square



Heilsberg (Lidzbark Warminski), one of the best preserved of all the Prussian crusader castles. In 1251 the Order gave the site to the bishops of the Warmian diocese, and the splendid brick castle was built between 1350 and 1401.

Rössel (Reszel). The square courtyard with a huge corner tower was erected during the latter half of the 14th century. At the beginning of the 16th century a bailey wall and bastions were added, together with gunports. Rössel possesses a massive gate tower with machicolations, and just as at Thorn the castle and the town fortifications are joined as one.

The castle of Schönberg (Szymbark), which is today one of Poland's most dramatic ruins, was built by the Order for the bishops of the Pomezanian Chapter. Its architectural scheme differs in design from other military structures of the Order and its defensive system was of little value. It consists of a rectangular plan with one tower at each corner and two on each wing.



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A very different concept may be found at the castle of Schönberg (Szymbark), which is today one of Poland's most dramatic ruins. It was built by the Order for the bishops of the Pomezanian Chapter. Unlike Rössel and Heilsberg, however, its architectural scheme differs in design from other military structures of the Order, and its defensive system was of little value. It consists of a rectangular plan with one tower at each corner and two on each wing. On the western side was a large dwelling house and on the east a fortified gate with a sturdy approach bridge. The overall impression is of a ruined stately home rather than a military installation.

The influence of the red-brick castles

The red-brick castles of Prussia share a stylistic unity with certain structures in Lithuania, the state that was for much of the period under question the Order's deadliest enemy, although sometimes its closest ally. Kaunas is a prime example, but the most successful example of the direct export of the castle-building skills of the Teutonic Order may be seen at the island castle of Trakai in Lithuania. The first foundation at Trakai is the so-called Peninsula Castle, which is mentioned in the records of crusades to Lithuania from about 1384. The picturesque island castle was begun by Grand Duke Kestutis and completed by his son Grand Duke Vytautas the Great. Taking advantage of a period of truce between Lithuania and the Order, the Order's stonemason Radike was sent to supervise the construction.

Trakai is like a miniature Marienburg situated on a tiny island opposite the 'peninsula castle'. The Flemish traveller Gillibert de Lannoy described it in 1414 as follows:

> The old castle stands on one side of the lake, in open ground, The other one stands in the middle of a second lake, and is within a cannon shot of the old one. It is completely new, built from bricks following the French pattern.

Ironically, this was four years after Grand Duke Vytautas the Great had marched out of Trakai to begin the campaign that led to the battle of Tannenberg, where he crushed the members of the Teutonic order whose master stonemason had in happier times designed his castle for him.

The most successful example of exporting the castle-building skills of the Teutonic Order may be seen at the island castle of Trakai in Lithuania. Begun by Grand Duke Kestutis, Trakai was completed by his son Grand Duke Vytautas the Great. Taking advantage of a period of truce between Lithuania and the Order, the Order's stonemason Radike was sent to supervise the construction. Trakai is like a miniature Marienburg situated on a tiny island.

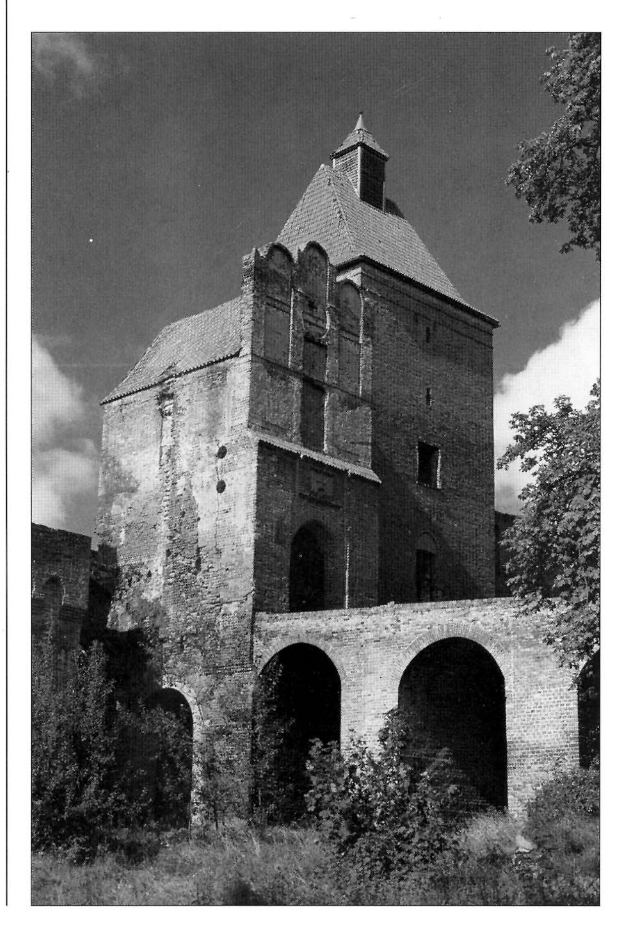


The living site

The castle garrison

The Prussian crusader castles of the Teutonic Order were occupied by warrior monks who had renounced individuality in favour of the three common goals of the destruction of the enemies of the Faith, the reception of guests and pilgrims, and the care of the sick. Their daily life in peace and war was heavily dependent upon the structure of the Order. At its head was the commanding presence of the elected Grand Master, who was based at Marienburg from 1309 onwards. A candidate for this highest office had to have been born in wedlock, never to have offended against the laws of chastity, nor to have committed theft. To be an aristocrat was not initially a requirement and the first Grand Masters were burghers of the city of Bremen. But in 1216 Pope Honorius III insisted that the Grand Master should be of knightly origin of or 'honest birth' so that he could be made a knight. Knightly ethics prevailed in the councils of the Order and, although obliged to take into account the opinion of experienced brothers and the decisions of the Order's Grand Chapter, the Grand Master remained a very powerful figure until the Order's final days. He was the head of a great international organisation of which the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor were patrons, so his word was law even in the distant lands of the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, who existed as members of a semi-autonomous organisation.

The magnificent ruined main entrance and bridge to the castle of Schönberg (Szymbark).



Below the Grand Master in Marienburg were the administrative posts of *Grosskomtur*, the Marshal, the *Spittler* (hospitaler), the *Tressler* (treasurer) and the *Trapier* (quartermaster). The *Grosskomtur* acted on the Grand Master's behalf in the administration of the headquarters and also led the army of the commandery of Marienburg into battle. The *Spittler* and *Trapier* were honorary titles referring to the *Komturs* (commanders) of Christburg and Elbing respectively. Following the conquest of Prussia the *Grosschaffer* (Minister of Trade) was in charge of developing commercial relations.

The Order's territories were divided into *Komtureis* or commanderies, each headed by a *Komtur*. An individual *Komtur* would be associated with one particular castle, so a translation as either commander or castellan is not inappropriate. In 1411 there were five commanderies in Pomerania, 11 in Kulmerland and ten in the rest of Prussia. The most important castles were somewhat confusingly referred to as convents, which indicated that they were permanent monastic garrisons. *Vogts* (bailiffs) headed smaller territorial divisions, sometimes linked to smaller castles.

All these areas were represented at the Grand Chapter, supposedly held annually at Marienburg. This was the inner council of the Order and involved the important castellans and advocates, representatives from the convents including priests and sergeants and the Masters of Germany and Livonia. The German

Master governed his province similarly to the Livonian Master, but as he faced no external foe he busied himself in imperial and church business, raising funds and hiring mercenaries for his brethren in Prussia and Livonia.



The south face of the ruined castle of Schönberg (Szymbark), built as a palace and possessing little real defensive value. Four of its 12 towers were located along the walls.

The inner core of the Order consisted of clergy and laymen, though brothers who were ordained as priests were few in number as it was the policy of the Order to keep the clergy's influence bound within narrow limits. The purpose of the Order was to provide highly trained warriors, not comfortable monks. The priest-brothers wore the characteristic white mantle with the black cross.

A Teutonic lay brother lived as a monk and fought as a knight. The average convent had about 12 knights, representing the apostles of Christ, and up to 60 sergeants, though these numbers could vary greatly. The lay brothers were not ordained priests, but had taken the monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and so participated fully in all aspects of the Order's life. Of the lay brothers, who came from all walks of life, only the knights wore the white mantle with the black cross, the sole heraldic display that they were allowed. They had neither coat of arms nor seal of their own. There were also secular members of the Order, who had not taken the three vows. They were distinguished by wearing the Greek letter 'tau', which is shaped like the letter 'T', instead of a cross on the mantle. The lower-born sergeants wore a grey mantle, but there was often little to choose between them and their knightly brethren when it came to fighting skills.

Apart from these details, the equipment and armour were uniform: each man was issued with two shirts, one pair of breeches, two pairs of boots, one simple overcoat, one sleeping bag, one blanket, one breviary and one knife. Nothing was to be 'too long, short, tight or wide'. He could be provided with four horses, but they were not his own and belonged to the convent. Every man wore his hair closely cropped, while the clergy had a tonsure and the lay brothers wore beards. In contrast to knightly fashion the full beard became a characteristic feature of the Teutonic Order, hence their nickname of 'the bearded ones'.

In addition to members of the Order, other groups of people would be found within the castle grounds both in peace and war. Servants and visiting townspeople, farmers transporting supplies, labourers working on repairs to a roof were all present and there was also a near-invisible category who were the slaves brought back from campaigns. A heroic poem written to commemorate Duke Albert III of Austria's 'guest crusade' with the Order in 1377 mentions in quite a matter-of-fact style:

> Women and children were taken captive;
> What a jolly medley could be seen,
> Many a woman could be seen,
> Two children tied to her body

Such wretches might be put to work in the castle, but they would more likely toil in the fields that provided the castle's economic livelihood.

The castle as economic centre

The economic base of the Order was agriculture and trade, and the proceeds of agricultural activity made their way into the castle in the form of taxes. The size and beauty of the castles helped the Teutonic Order acquire a reputation for possessing fantastic wealth, but money was never as plentiful as was imagined and the illusion of wealth owed less to great income and more to careful management of resources coupled with a relatively inexpensive army. It was much cheaper to house an army of fanatic religious volunteers sworn to poverty, chastity and obedience, and feed them meagre fare than to depend upon aristocratic knightly vassals with wives, families and a position to maintain in society.

Until about 1230, when the Prussian Crusade began, the Teutonic Order's overall economic position was weak. It began to grow as the conquered Prussian territories expanded, but Prussia contained more wilderness and swamp than arable land. These initial economic setbacks were augmented by grants of land in Sicily and southern Italy made to the Order by Emperor Frederick. Money also came in from the richer estates of Germany. Nevertheless, as Teutonic Prussia grew so did its productivity, in spite of long cold winters and short growing seasons. The castle, as the economic centre of a commandery, took the lead in the careful management of both land and people. The Order encouraged enterprises that would yield tax and protected the peasant communities, many of whom were brought in as settlers, from pagan devastation both from within Prussia and across its borders.

The Order's approach to the free Prussian natives was cautious and conservative. Hard experience taught them that imposing drastic change led to revolt, so the natives paid their rent in produce at about three bushels per household or double that if their ancestors had rebelled. They also paid a tax of one mark per year, which they raised by selling grain to the merchants, and were required to work for two days a year ploughing and two days a year harvesting on the Order's own estates. In addition they could be summoned at any time to build castles, churches, roads or bridges.

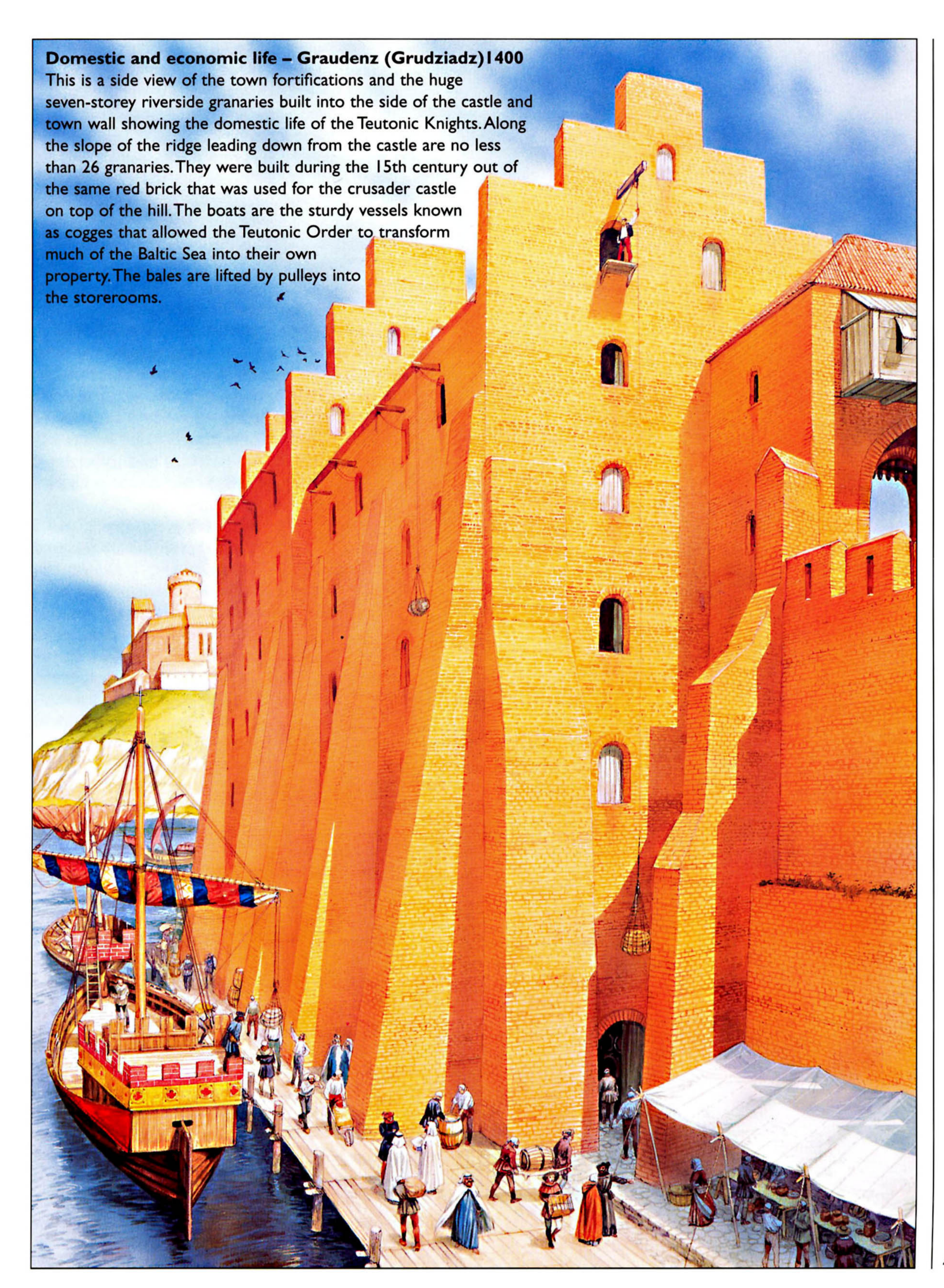
Few details are known about land management, but the Order introduced progressive methods such as windmills, watermills, diking and drainage. This policy proved so successful that the agricultural and mercantile communities were able to provide dependable and profitable exports. This made many communities virtually self-sufficient, so that money from Germany could be put into capital projects, of which castle building was the most important.

In spite of the brothers' monastic vows of poverty, trade prospered under their protection, making the Teutonic state of Prussia the only contemporary state with no foreign debt. The Order issued gold coins from 1394 onwards. One of the advantages possessed by the Order were their cogges, round-bottomed sailing ships that carried bulk cargo so safely and cheaply that German merchants were able to undersell all competitors and make the Baltic Sea into practically a German lake. The Order's fleet of ships sailed as far as Gotland to sell grain, amber, linen and wood.

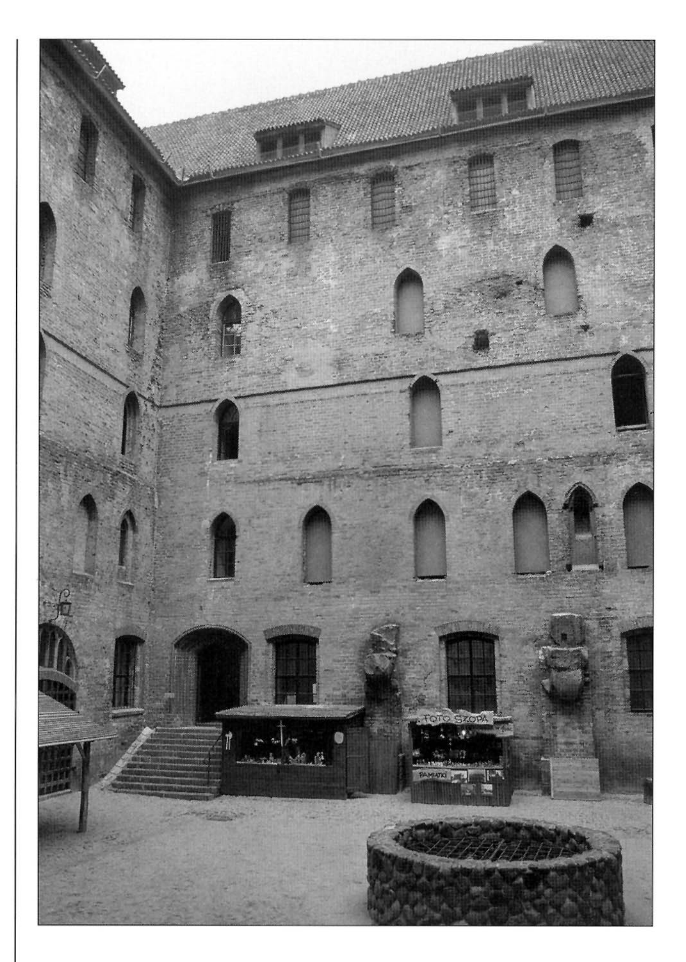
The administrative side of the Order's affairs, including trade, was facilitated by an efficient postal service, which tracked mail en route through the castles and used a system of postal codes indicating the urgency of the communication. To give an example from 1429, a letter left Memel (Klaipeda in Lithuania), the Order's most northerly outpost at 21.00 on a Thursday, and reached Elbing at 20.00 on the following Sunday.

The castle as monastery

The function of the castle as a monastery was second only to its role as a fortress. The brothers led a life divided between the sacred and the secular, and the two very different worlds of the knight and the monk produced their own demands and their own tensions. But the two roles were never seen as incompatible,



Domestic and economic life – Graudenz (Grudziadz) 1400
This is a side view of the town fortifications and the huge seven-storey riverside granaries built into the side of the castle and town wall showing the domestic life of the Teutonic Knights. Along the slope of the ridge leading down from the castle are no less than 26 granaries. They were built during the 15th century out of the same red brick that was used for the crusader castle on top of the hill. The boats are the sturdy vessels known as cogges that allowed the Teutonic Order to transform much of the Baltic Sea into their own property. The bales are lifted by pulleys into the storerooms.



The prison-like interior of the inner courtyard of Mewe (Gniew) enclosed within its four stout walls. This is perhaps the most forbidding interior of any crusader castle in Poland, and may be contrasted with the comparative delicacy of the inner courtyard of the High Castle of Marienburg (Malbork).

because Latin Christendom accepted that to fight against the heathen was a laudable and holy enterprise. In the courtyards of a castle the knight-brother learned to fight. In the cloisters and the chapel of the castle he recharged his spiritual batteries.

The chapel of the castle was the centre of the convent's spiritual life, and as monks its inmates were required to recite the offices according to a daily calendar. This was compulsory while on a military campaign as well as inside the convent and the one concession made to this duty was that the Order used a streamlined version of the liturgy that the Dominicans had adopted for similar circumstances. While on campaign in 1344 the Grand Master obtained Papal permission to begin the first Mass of the day before dawn, because the days in the north of Europe were so short that the army had to be ready to move while it was still dark. Nevertheless, the Mass still had to be timed so that the hallowing of the Sacrament coincided with the first rays of the rising sun.

As most of the brothers were not actually priests and so could not say Mass, their religious duties were mostly passive: expressing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience within the daily routine of the Order. The brothers were required to go to Communion seven times a year. Feast days and Saints' days added variety to the liturgical year and the brothers had to observe the fasts of the Church. They offered prayers for souls of dead brothers, for those killed in action and for the souls of benefactors. Funerals were conducted in the chapel and many knights lie buried in the small graveyard at Marienburg just beside St Anne's chapel within the castle. Following the terrible battle of Tannenberg in 1410, the bodies of the fallen Grand Master and other dignitaries of the Order were dressed in purple and shrouded in clean white sheets to be loaded reverently onto a wagon that was granted safe conduct to Marienburg. The chronicler Posilge mentions the burial of the Grand Master in St Anne's chapel on 19 July 1410.

One other important ritual that would be conducted in a castle's chapel was the reception into the community of a new brother, but not all postulants were young knights seeking a life of chivalric adventure. In 1266 one joined the Order as a way of avoiding the death penalty. Another joined in 1288 at the minimum age of 14, although he had decided upon this course of action when he was jilted at the age of seven by his five-year-old fiancée!

One of the most dramatic ceremonies that would be witnessed in the chapel of Marienburg was the reception of a newly elected Grand Master. When the result of the election was announced the bells were rung and the priest-brothers sang the Te Deum. The Deputy Master then escorted the new Grand Master to the altar and invested him with a ring and a circular seal depicting the Virgin Mary enthroned holding the Christ-child and sceptre.

Communal life in the castle

The eating of communal meals in the castle's Refectory was a vital part of the monastic life. For three days of the week meat was included. For three more days only eggs or dairy products supplied the protein, and Friday was a weekly

fast day. There were 21 other fast days as well as Lent, and a complete meatless season for most of November and December. The only exceptions were for the sick or the weak, for whom the meal could be enhanced. Eggs, milk, porridge and water formed the brothers' staple diet. Two meals were eaten on non-fast days, consisting of two courses. On fast days there was one meal of one course, and beer, mead or wine took the place of the evening meal. The fare would be more elaborate when the Order had to entertain famous and influential guests. In 1404 a scribe of the Order made the following entry:

> Spent the sum of 101 marks on the purchase and convoy from Danzig to the cellars and pantry of the Grand Master: Rhenish wine, mead, beer, raisins, almonds, sweets, cloves, ginger, rice, fish.

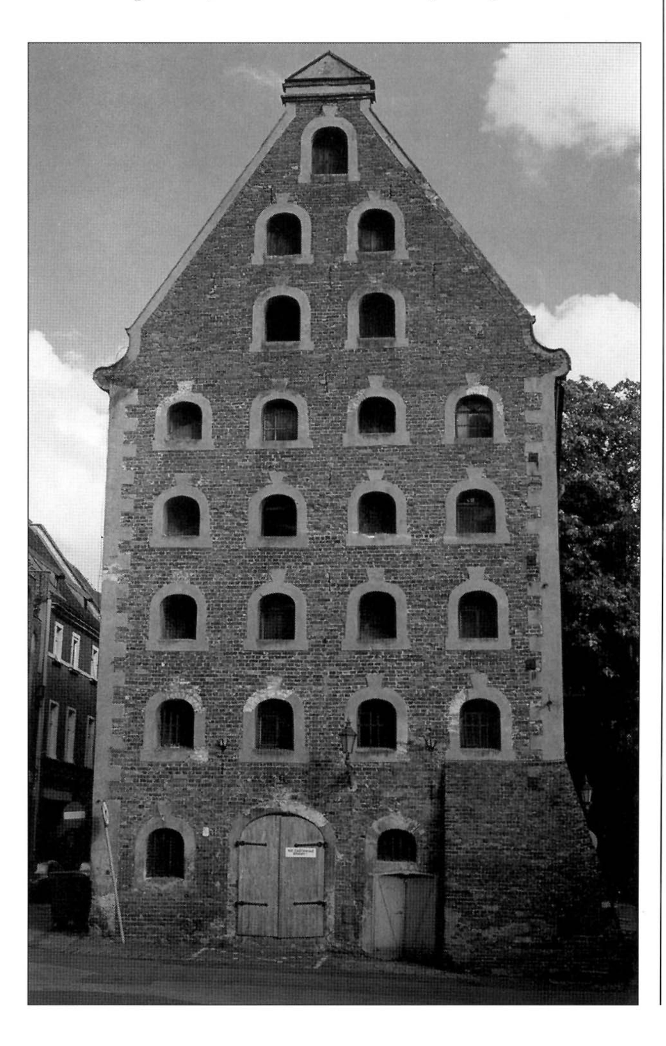
Such exotic spices, however, did not indicate luxury, but were a necessity if meat preserved throughout the winter was to be made palatable. However, there are some expensive delicacies listed elsewhere in the financial records of the Order, such as aniseed, quince, coriander and currant confectionery.

Meals began with grace said by a priest, followed by a recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary by the brothers. When eating two brothers shared one bowl, with only drink being taken from individual cups. The brothers had to remain silent at table (as they did at the latrine or on the march) unless the Commander granted an exception such as when visitors were present, but a lesson would be read to them while they ate. Bread left on the table uneaten was given to the poor, as was one-tenth of all the bread baked in the Convent.

The drinking of beer was only natural in a society where water was often unsafe. The Order maintained its own breweries, which produced more beer than was needed by the brothers themselves, so the revenue from tax on beer and from the licensing of taverns made a contribution to the Order's finances. With beer so freely available drunkenness was a real temptation and several later commentators were to deride the brethren of the Teutonic Order for their excessive drinking. As one writer put it:

> They drink beer immoderately, encouraging and forcing one another to such excesses as would be too much for an ox. And they are not satisfied with drinking to satiety but drink until they are sober again. So they pass the entire day and often the entire night, and whoever overcomes the others in drinking, he is praised and honoured.

The Order's dignitaries had a single room, but all the other brothers slept in a communal dormitory, clothed in a shirt, trousers and stockings or boots so as to mortify the flesh and also be ready for action. A light burned in the room throughout the night and no man was allowed to put a lock on his possession box. No one was allowed to sleep outside of a castle except when at war, but as there was no more than one day's journey between castles this caused little inconvenience.



This granary, which stands next to the Leaning Tower of Torun, symbolises the importance of the grain trade to the city and to the Teutonic Knights. This building actually dates from the early-17th century, but there is a smaller 14th-century example next to it.

The senior members of the Order had some small pleasures, as there are payments noted in the records for hiring players, jesters, pipers, flautists, fiddlers and painters, not to mention a supply of whippets, falcons, goshawks and even a parrot. Singers were paid to give recitals, but apart from such gentle diversions the normal pleasures and activities of secular knighthood were denied to the brothers. Teutonic Knights were not allowed to joust, nor could they hunt except for wolves or bears, although this latter rule seems to have been relaxed to accommodate guest crusaders.

Crime and punishment

Although they were both monks and knights, the inhabitants of the crusader castles were only human and suffered from the same weaknesses that afflicted those living outside the Rule. In fact, the pressures of communal living sometimes magnified temptations. Officials who spent so much of their time making lists could become petty, pedantic and possessive, and although much of a brother's day in peacetime would be taken up with monastic duties, an excess of boredom and heavy drinking could lead to fractiousness and even violence. In 1428 the Commander of Graudentz (Grudziadz) was called in to investigate a serious case in another castle involving a stabbing by a drunken brother.

The vow of chastity, of course, produced its own challenges and problems, but some brothers are recorded as going to extreme lengths to demonstrate how sincerely they took the prohibition on sex. Berchtold Bruhave, who was the Commander of Königsberg between 1289 and 1302, greatly impressed his colleagues before joining the Order by choosing the prettiest girl he could find and sleeping with her for a year without touching her. Others mortified their flesh in more physically painful ways by wearing their mail shirts next to the skin until the raw flesh rusted the metal. Brothers were forbidden to kiss any woman, even their mother and sisters. Outside the castle, however, the situation could be very different and the rape of women during war is quite well attested. During the 1329–32 campaign in Poland one burgher had watched Teutonic Knights drag women into their tents, and a knight testified that the brothers of the Order had raped more women than their Prussian underlings.

Punishments would be inflicted upon brothers who had transgressed from their Rule. The brother might be deprived of his food or receive ritualised corporal punishment with his colleagues looking on. The severe punishment known as *iarbusse* meant that the offender first had the cross removed from his habit. He then had to labour alongside prisoners of war for a year, take meals without a table and receive corporal punishment on Sundays. But of all punishments banishment was the most terrible. Not many years after his victory at Marienburg Grand Master Heinrich von Plauen was found guilty of treason and banished to lonely Lochstädt castle. He wrote complaining that the Marshal of Königsberg and his men had eaten their way through the food stores and that he was reduced to consuming only black bread.

The castle as hospital

In acknowledgement of the fact that a hospital rather than warfare represented its origin, the function of caring for the sick was maintained throughout the Order's existence. Any ailing or sick people accepted into the Order's care were looked after in the infirmary. The patients had first to go to Confession, and while they were in the hospital they were fed before the brothers of the order ate their meals. Doctors were provided, and the care of the sick also represented the only role, apart from the care of animals, that women could play in the life of the Order. The women had to occupy a house separate from that of the brothers.

The treatment that an inmate of one of the Order's hospitals might expect to receive was of course very different from our modern understanding of a health service. Records exist of the activities that went on in the hospital in Elbing in 1400. They show that the treatment the patients received was very

different from what we would expect to find in a modern hospital. The sick received far more in terms of alms and Masses for their souls than they did in terms of medicine for their bodies. Nevertheless, the care and attention that the patients received made up a not inconsiderable part of the Order's expenses. To help towards the costs the Grand Master was allowed to send the brothers far and wide to beg for alms.

Daily life in the castle in wartime

The castles of the Teutonic Order were far more than mere monasteries to which defensive fortifications had been added. They were military bases, border posts, frontier forts and administrative centres all at the same time and a commander was much more than an Abbot trained for war. Depending upon his location, he was the governor of a vast territory or a vital leader of border guards. He would be expected to organise patrols, train militia, control mercenaries, practise both individual and unit military skills, and, when necessary, lead his brothers in war or siege. Details of siege warfare may be found elsewhere in this book, but we will look now at the preparations made for war.

Because the commander was responsible for wide areas of administration from his castle he controlled the collection of taxes and supervised justice. This gave him an overview of the strength and loyalty of the local people who would seek refuge with him in times of war. He also had the related responsibility for the minutiae of daily garrison life, such as seeing that the castle had sufficient food, that stores of weapons and armour were adequate and that the castle's defences were in good repair.

As noted earlier, each castle was required to store supplies for two years of continual siege. A 'snapshot' taken from an inventory for Elbing of 1440 shows cellars containing 430 barrels of beer, four barrels of honey, 80 score barrels of fat, 428 sides of beef, pork and tongue, half a barrel of butter, two and a half

A wide-angle view showing the complete line of the granaries of Grudziadz.



barrels of pickled meat and a quantity of salt. This was for a garrison of about 40 brothers plus servants, of whom an earlier inventory of 1386 counts 152. Elbing was indeed well prepared, as was nearby Lochstädt in 1429. The food in its stores consisted of half a barrel of herring, 7 barrels of cod, two barrels of oil, 30 sides of meat, two pieces of mutton, 42 pieces of pork, 12 strings of sausages and two barrels of salt. There was also a large quantity of beer and 5,500 cheeses.

Arms and armour were listed alongside foodstuffs. In the inventory list for Elbing in 1440 we also note 59 guns, 12½ barrels of powder, two barrels of saltpetre, 1,800 score of arrows, 21 iron helmets, 17 breastplates, seven pairs of gauntlets, two pairs of arm guards ands one thigh guardr. Even a minor castle like Ortelsburg (Szczytno) needed to be well armed, and an inventory for 1416 lists five cannon, seven guns, a barrel of powder, 60 crossbows and 15,000 arrows.

Every crusader castle had its workshop where crossbows were made and large-scale production of horn crossbows by the Teutonic Order is revealed by an inventory for the workshop in Marienburg in 1409, just prior to the Polish invasion. There were enough materials for making 1,200 new crossbows, listed as:

1,200 billy-goat horns
800 'horns' from the head of a great sturgeon (to add elasticity)
36,000 sinews
glue from fish and cattle hides
birch bark (for coating the bows as weatherproofing)
240 prepared nuts for the trigger mechanism
27 stags' antlers for making nuts
20 elk bones for sockets
340 wooden stocks at various stages of manufacture
50 pounds of flax thread from Flanders for bowstrings

The most important assets in a castle were of course the fighting men that the commander had at his disposal. An inventory for Elbing in 1451 counted 41 brothers, of whom four were priest-brothers and five were sick in the infirmary. The actual Teutonic Knights, the heavily armoured and mounted knight-brothers clad in the white mantle with the black cross, were always a minority in their own army. Two hundred and three fell during the battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) and as very few fled or were captured, the total number present at this famous battle cannot have been much more than 250. The rest of the Prussian knights who fought at Tannenberg (Grunwald) lived on the Order's lands but were not actually members. The towns also fielded contingents and armed peasants were also recruited to swell the numbers.

Otherwise the castle garrison had to be increased during wartime by hiring mercenaries. Hired knights were recruited in Prussia, but use was also made of mercenaries from other lands. In 1409 a letter from the Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen states that the Order had sent for guest crusaders and for Genoese crossbowmen.

Operational history

Siege warfare and the timber castles

The earliest form of challenge to the Order's castles came in the form of raids. The pagan raiders followed the traditional tactics of the region, attacking by surprise, seizing the women and children for slaves, killing the men, the very young and the old, and driving together all the cattle and horses as booty then heading for home. As the crusaders failed at first either to conquer the tribes or retaliate against them, the wooden castles became their system of frontier defence. They acted as a base for patrols and as a muster point for tribes loyal to the Knights who acted as a native militia. When a raiding party was spotted local people took refuge in the forts while the soldiers went into battle.

Early siege warfare by the pagan Prussians was largely ineffective. Attackers relied on surprise and bravery, with assault and the use of fire providing the main means of attacking wooden outposts. As noted earlier, crossbows were vital defensive weapons and in 1265 there is an account of how the sharpshooting of one crossbowman stopped the Lithuanians using stone-throwing machines against one of the Order's minor outposts at Wehlau, which lay on the Pregel River upstream from Königsberg. He first killed the Lithuanian leader with a bolt and then put the catapult out of action by shooting at the man who was in charge of it and nailing his hand to the machine. Crossbow archery again proved its worth in defence in 1271, when an assault was launched on a Teutonic outpost and repulsed by accurate shooting.

The following winter archery was used by the Order as one tactic in capturing an un-named Prussian fort controlled by the rebel Henry Monte. Several stone-throwers were built, and archers were placed in secure firing positions. The moat was filled in using lumber and earth under cover of both forms of missile fire, then a siege tower was dragged up to the walls. This provided a bridge for the knights to fight their way in, while the other ranks tried to scale siege ladders, again under the cover of archery and catapult fire. The attack succeeded at the cost of 150 dead in the crusader army.

The events of the second Prussian revolt, where some sieges lasted three years, provide several instances of Prussian armies working together to blockade castles by building small forts around them so that no one could go in or out. The chronicler tells us that during one particular operation the garrison first ate all the



The city of Kaunas in Lithuania lies at the confluence of the river Neman (Nemunas) with the river Neris, to the left, which flows down from Vilnius. The design of Kaunas castle, which lay on the peninsula where the rivers met, reflected the use of brick in the Prussian castles. Kaunas was a bitterly contested place over many decades.

food from the castle stores; then they consumed the cattle that had been brought inside the castle for protection; after that they ate their horses; finally they were driven to eating the hides of the animals they had already slaughtered, which caused deficiency diseases among the men. By the end of the long siege many had lost their teeth and were reduced to walking skeletons.

Some castles, of course, could be more easily supplied and reinforced than others. Königsberg is a good example, and when it came under siege around the year 1263 the commander was not unduly worried because he had enough food for the winter and during the summer the sturdy cogges could be expected to come upriver with supplies. But the ingenious Prussians were ready for them and equipped their own ships as war vessels. One brave member of the Königsberg garrison hindered the blockaders by swimming out to the Prussian ships and silently drilling holes in their bottoms, but this was soon rendered unimportant when the Prussians built a bridge of boats across the Pregel and protected it with a wooden fort. This called for desperate measures:

> When the brothers in the castle contemplated death by starvation they decided it would be better to perish in battle than die miserably by famine. They went on to a ship and approached the bridge of boats anchored there, and when a strong wind came they rammed the bridge, reaching it successfully by the Grace of God, and climbing on to the bridge found it and the fort filled with armed men who resisted them stoutly.

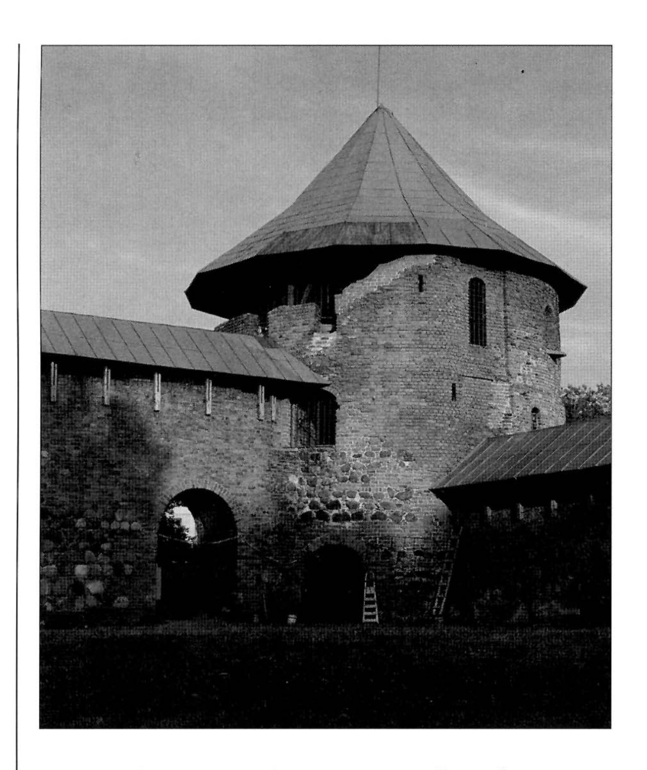
Siege warfare and the brick castles

The subsequent operations against the stronger brick castles involved a similar pattern of raiding and sieges, of which the former practice was more common owing to the strength of the new fortresses. Raiding was in fact not usually directed against the castles themselves, but the towns, villages, farms and churches under the castles' protection, thus provoking a reaction by the local garrison.

One of the most interesting examples of a siege of a red-brick castle is the 1362 operation directed against Kaunas castle in Lithuania by the Teutonic Order. Accounts tell us that the Grand Master led the siege in the belief that Kestutis himself was there. In fact the defence, which lasted several months, was in the capable hands of his son Vaidotis. Mining played an important part when the Teutonic Knights managed to pancake the entire outer wall. A wooden siege tower was then erected to provide arrow fire onto the inner wall. Kaunas was built from brick and stone above a stone base with more use of stone in the walls themselves than would be found in Prussia. Brick was also used for the finer details of gateways and arches. The chronicler of the victory tells us how Mass was said on the field of battle following the fall of the castle.

OPPOSITE **The castle under attack (1) – Kaunas 1362**
This plate depicts one of the most celebrated sieges of a predominantly brick-built castle at a time prior to the introduction of gunpowder weapons, although primitive firearms may have been used at this siege. In 1362 the Teutonic Knights attacked the castle of Kaunas in Lithuania, which lay on a narrow piece of land where the Neris River entered the Nemunas. Successive Grand Dukes had erected fortifications that were very similar in design and equally impressive in defence to the Teutonic Knights own brick castles. We see here the culmination of a long siege of several months involving mining. Mining played an important part when the Teutonic Knights managed to pancake the entire outer wall. A wooden siege tower was then erected to provide arrow fire on to the inner wall. The collapse of the wall has shown how it was constructed. Kaunas was built from brick and stone above a stone base with more use of stone in the walls themselves than would be found in Prussia. The walkway built into the wall at the top has been extended backwards into the courtyard supported on stout wooden beams and pillars. There is an external stone staircase leading into the towers. Heavy wooden hinged shutters that drop down vertically protect the windows. Note how brick is also used for the finer details of gateways and arches. The two once graceful towers have gaping holes in their tiled roofs. The reconstruction is based on the surviving sections of Kaunas castle and a diorama in the Vytautas the Great Military Museum in Kaunas.







ABOVE LEFT A reconstructed tower of Kaunas castle in Lithuania. It was captured by the Teutonic Knights after several months of siege in 1362 and destroyed. The Order tried to rebuild it as a forward post in 1384, calling it Marienwerder, but were frustrated by Lithuanian artillery floated down from Vilnius.

ABOVE RIGHT The castle of Soldau (Dzialdowo), which surrendered to the Polish/Lithuanian army after the battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) in 1410.

Sieges became more frequent during the wars of the 15th century when the Order found Poland/Lithuania to be a rival that had the resources, expertise and the time to conduct this form of warfare. The most serious raids on the crusader castles occurred during the Polish/Lithuanian invasion in the Tannenberg campaign of 1410. By all accounts, the allied army wreaked havoc as it swept through Prussia on its way to Marienburg. Depending on one's personal bias the reports of their atrocities mean that they either equalled the Teutonic Knights in their brutality, or that the Order's propaganda machine equalled that of the Poles. So frequent are the references to the looting and desecration of churches that there must be some factual basis to it, but the Polish chroniclers could always blame the pagan Tartars in the Lithuanian army if evidence of atrocities was incontrovertible.

An early incident at Lautenburg (Lidzbark) shows clearly that atrocities by Catholic Poland against Catholic Prussia were officially unacceptable. According to the chronicler Dlugosz, two Lithuanians found guilty of looting a church were ordered to erect their own gallows and then hang themselves in full view of their comrades. This created a tremendous impression on their Polish allies. 'The Grand Duke instilled so much terror in all the knights that they shook like leaves before him', wrote Dlugosz. There were no further disciplinary problems after that.

The first Prussian castle to be attacked was Gilgenburg (Dabrowno), which lies on a very narrow neck of land dividing two lakes from each other. The Lithuanians in the allied vanguard stormed the castle, and the German chronicler Posilge described the chaos as follows:

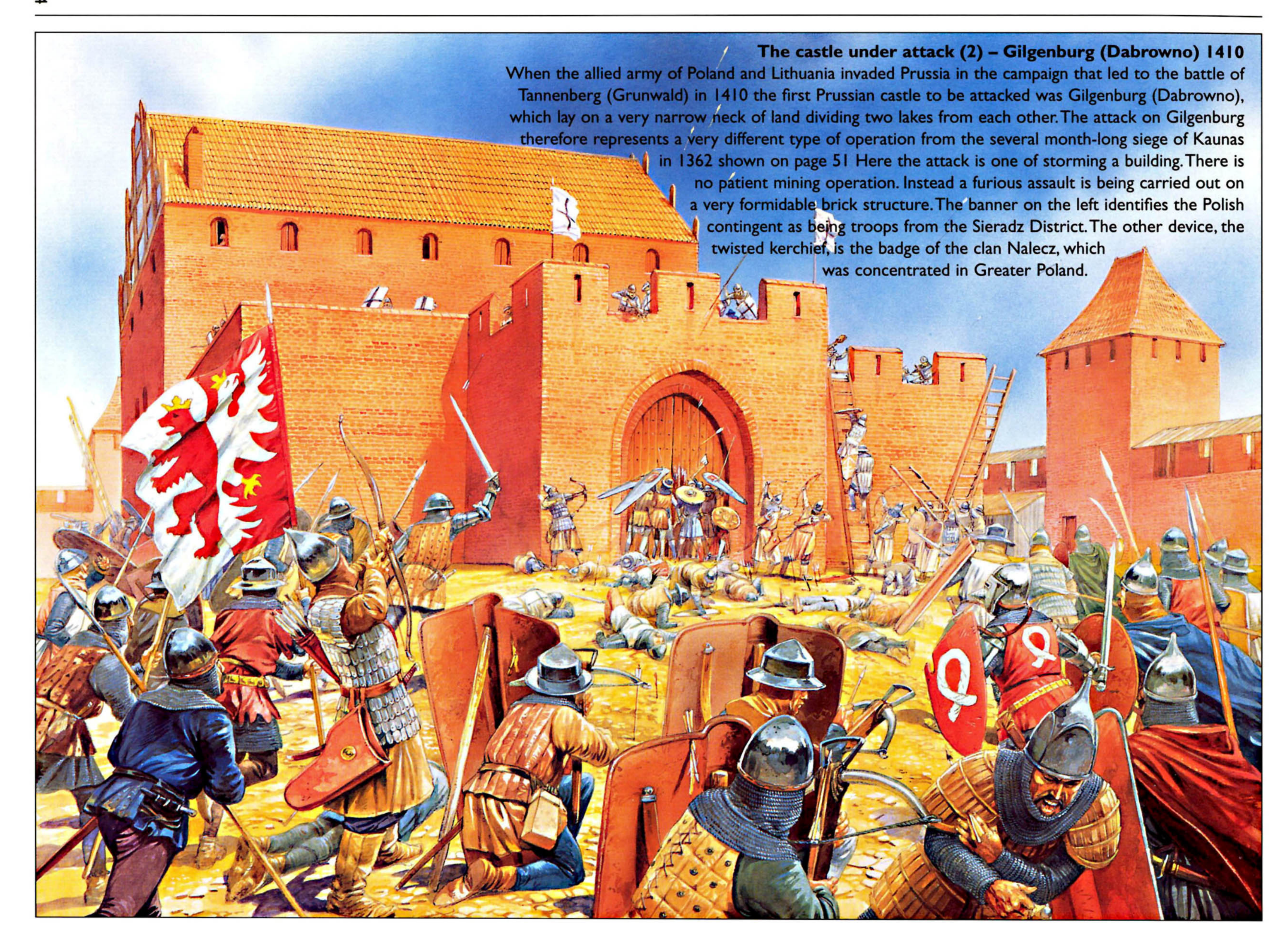
> They conquered the town and burnt it down and they slew the young and the old and they and their heathen allies committed unspeakable murders. And they besmirched the churches and cut off the breasts of young girls and women and horribly tortured them and let them be led away into servitude. They also did many shameful things with the sacraments; whatever they came across in the churches, they tore to pieces with their hands and trod it underfoot, and they did it in jest.



The eastern defence works of the castle of Marienburg (Malbork). The prominent double tower is known as the Carver's Gate. This was the side of the castle that saw most action during the sieges of 1410 and 1457.

The next armed encounter between the allies and the Order occurred not in a castle but on the battlefield of Tannenberg (Grunwald). Thousands of men who fought for the Order were slain, but the destruction of the Order's army in a battle had never been the primary objective of the invasion. The overall goal was Marienburg, and with thousands of Teutonic Knights lying dead beside the corpse of their Grand Master the occupation of Marienburg should have been a straightforward matter but, astoundingly, it did not happen. The rituals of victory took precious time, and the exhausted and depleted army then made slow progress towards Marienburg. They marched at only nine miles a day, even though neither of the three fortresses on their route, Hohenstein (Olsztynek), Osterode (Ostroda) and Christburg (Dzierzgon), offered them any resistance.

This allowed sufficient time for Heinrich von Plauen to prepare the defences of Marienburg. He was one of the Order's finest soldiers, but the challenge facing him was immense. The Marienburg garrison had already heard of the defeat at Tannenberg and were ready to surrender, but through a superhuman effort von Plauen rallied them and increased their defences. He ordered the burning of the city outside Marienburg's walls to deprive the Poles of any shelter and to give a good field of fire from the castle. The homeless citizens sheltered inside the castle. The Poles and Lithuanians arrived on 26 July and commenced a night bombardment, but the great castle justified all the hopes placed in it. Marienburg held out for 57 days until the Polish king was forced to withdraw in the face of dysentery among his army and hostile movements elsewhere.



The castle under attack (2) – Gilgenburg (Dabrowno) 1410

When the allied army of Poland and Lithuania invaded Prussia in the campaign that led to the battle of Tannenberg (Grunwald) in 1410 the first Prussian castle to be attacked was Gilgenburg (Dabrowno), which lay on a very narrow neck of land dividing two lakes from each other. The attack on Gilgenburg therefore represents a very different type of operation from the several month-long siege of Kaunas in 1362 shown on page 51 Here the attack is one of storming a building. There is no patient mining operation. Instead a furious assault is being carried out on a very formidable brick structure. The banner on the left identifies the Polish contingent as being troops from the Sieradz District. The other device, the twisted kerchief, is the badge of the clan Nalecz, which was concentrated in Greater Poland.

The later sieges

In 1418 King Wladislaw Jagiello of Poland demanded the Order's western territories. When his demands were finally refused in 1422 Poland/Lithuania invaded Prussia once more and another war of sieges began. But, just as during the Grunwald campaign, siege guns were not much in evidence. The Poles first settled down to besiege the fortress of Lobau (Lubawa) and an eyewitness reported:

> they have laid siege with their forces up to today. They have closed the first ditch by the Middle Mill and have destroyed the great sluice so that we have no water apart from that which is in the town ditches ... they shoot fire arrows frequently into the town. Due to the grace of God they have not done much harm. Also your worthiness should know that we have caught a prisoner who has confessed to us that the King has no more than one cannon, although he has sent some wagons to the cannons that he has.

After Lobau King Wladislaw marched to Reisenburg (Prabuty), which was subsequently destroyed, but as his siege guns were still in transit he abandoned the idea of an attack on Marienburg and took his army south, besieging Gollub (Golub Dobrzyn) and Schönsee (Kowalewo Pomorskie). There, worried by the imminence of outside interference, the king accepted a truce on 17 September.

The so-called 'Gollub War' had lasted only two months but several Prussian crusader castles had been taken quite successfully. By contrast, the response of the Order had been lamentable throughout, with confusion at the top and blind panic inside the castles. On 6 August the *Komtur* of Elbing reported that his levies had deserted because of lack of supplies. The *Komtur* of Christburg had only 20 men, and 'felt lost'. There were no mercenaries in Schwetz but 100 unarmed peasants had arrived, who kept off starvation by labouring in the town ditches for pay.

When Poland/Lithuania launched a further offensive in 1433 the leadership of the Order was in no better state, and the Poles and Lithuanians had also been engaged in active negotiations with the Hussites of Bohemia. Their religious views may have differed widely, but the Polish king recognised that both they and the heretic rebels had a common enemy. In their most audacious act an army of Hussites joined the Poles to invade Prussia. They captured Dirschau (Tczew) on the Vistula and, after an abortive siege of Danzig, they marched defiantly to the sea, where they symbolically filled their water bottles with the brine of the Baltic as a victory celebration.

In 1440 the Knights' territories themselves began to fall apart, because in that year representatives from the towns of Danzig, Thorn and Elbing met at Marienwerder and founded the Prussian Union as an alternative government to the Teutonic Order. In 1454 the Union went to war with the Order, attacking and burning the Order's castles, among them their first castle at Kulm. From 1454 onwards the wound inflicted on the

In this view we are looking down from the top of the tower of Kwidzyn cathedral onto the buildings that now constitute the remains of the magnificent Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) castle, the crusader fortress of the Teutonic Order that was second in importance only to Marienburg.

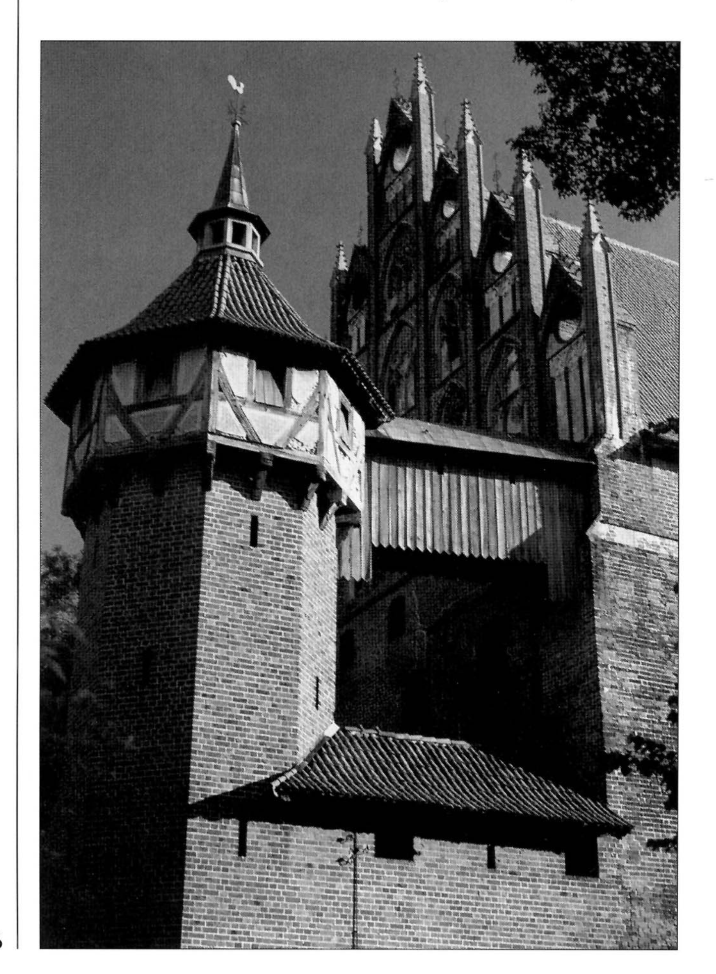


Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg grew more and more fatal, and as the Order's overall fortunes went into reverse their addiction to mercenaries did not help the bank balance. On 11 February 1454 the Commander of Thorn reported that his men had been under bombardment day and night and that the men were falling down from sleeplessness. He added that 'some of the mercenaries which your Grace sent us jumped over the walls, others crept into corners', and if mercenaries were not paid they could seek out their compensation in the villages. That same month the citizens of Thorn besieged Thorn castle, and when the Knights withdrew they demolished the entire edifice brick by brick. By the end of March 1454 every fortress of the Order except Marienburg and Stuhm (Sztum) was in the hands of the Union.

The formal incorporation of the Union with Poland was the beginning of a renewed conflict between Poland and the Order that is known as the Thirteen Years War. King Casimir IV of Poland crossed the Prussian border, took Stuhm and began a sieges of Marienburg, but in September 1454 the Polish army was defeated at the battle of Chojnice and the king himself narrowly escaped capture. At the news of the victory Königsberg and most of the towns east of the Vistula reverted to the Order, heartened by the performance of Heinrich Reuss von Plauen, a descendant of the hero of 1410 of the same name, who had revived some of the ancient glories of the Teutonic Knights. The towns of the districts of Kulmerland and Warmia and the city of Danzig remained loyal to the King, but even here there were elements favourable to the Order.

Mercenaries remained a problem. In December 1454 we read that Bishop Caspar of Pomerelia informed the Grand Master of the depredations of mercenaries in a certain village. They arrived on Sunday night 'speaking Czech', breaking into the houses and making off with all manner of goods.

On the western side of Marienburg (Malbork) castle lies this interesting set of buildings. The striking façade is the infirmary, which is linked by an overhead walkway to the graceful *dansk* (sewage tower) known as the Hen's Foot Tower.



The fall of Marienburg

The reference above to the mercenaries' language is very revealing, because the end of the Hussite Wars had thrown onto the European market some of the toughest soldiers in Europe, mercenaries who it was prudent to pay regularly. In 1455 the Grand Master defrayed the cost of wages by pawning more than 20 of his towns and castles including Marienburg itself. This was an extraordinary step, pawning the capital to pay the men who were supposed to be defending it!

In August 1456 a group of Bohemians supposedly guarding Marienburg broke into its malt-house and attacked and robbed five officers of the Order. Two of the latter jumped from a high window rather than remain in the building with these ruthless ruffians. One Austrian mercenary captain, returning in high dudgeon from a meeting with the Grand Master, attacked a senior officer and stole his keys, after which he made off with the man's valuables. With the contempt learned during the religious wars in Bohemia the Czech mercenaries knocked over the crucifix in Marienburg's chapel 'and ran up and down with blasphemous shrieks of delight'. In the nearby castle of Mewe (Gniew) Teutonic Knights were tied in their cells and had



their beards forcibly shaved, which in some cases took off their lips as well. In desperation, the Grand Master offered the mob the contents of the chapel, but jewels were of little avail and to show their contempt for him and all that he stood for the mercenaries, who now had the upper hand, resorted to theatrical gestures. The Grand Master was shunted from cell to cell, and the portions of food served to the brethren grew smaller and smaller. One complainant even protested indignantly that the beer they now had to drink was warm!

So the farce continued, and the final act began on 16 August 1456, when the Bohemian mercenary captain supposedly defending Marienburg, the spiritual home of the Teutonic Knights, organised its sale to King Casimir IV of Poland at a knockdown price. It took almost another year for the sale-cum-siege to be completed, and at Whitsuntide in 1457 the Order's capital of Marienburg finally fell into Polish hands. Bizarrely, this came about not as a result of a successful siege of the great fortress, but because the Grand Master's Bohemian mercenaries literally threw him out and admitted a group of Polish and Prussian Union soldiers through the gate. The Grand Master was allowed to escape with his life, although his route was stage-managed so that he could be exhibited along the way. He eventually arrived in Königsberg where the magistrate of the city, overcome by compassion, presented him with a barrel of beer.

Only one flicker of Teutonic resistance remained at Marienburg. The castle may have fallen, but the town held out under the Burgomaster Bartholomaus Blome and Heinrich Reuss von Plauen, of Chojnice fame, for a further three years. They were the last heroes of the Order in Prussia and the fall of Marienburg symbolised the end of the Order's hegemony over the chain of red-brick crusader castles that had dominated the military life of Prussia for over two centuries.

The curious painting in the house known as Arthur's Court in Gdansk is of the siege of Marienburg (Malbork) in 1457. Although the details of the castle, as seen from the north, appear to be accurate, the artist has added a false romantic mountain background to the scene.

Aftermath

The Treaty of Thorn was signed on 19 October 1466 and from that moment on every crusader castle in Prussia became a Polish possession. The territory west of the Vistula and Nogat Rivers was ceded to Poland, in addition to Kulm, Marienburg and Elbing, as the autonomous province of Royal Prussia. What was left of the Teutonic lands, now called East Prussia, was given back to the Knights, but only as a fief of the Polish crown and the Grand Master swore an oath of fealty to King Casimir IV in rags and tears. His capital was transferred to Königsberg and only the Order's Livonian territory to the north remained independent.

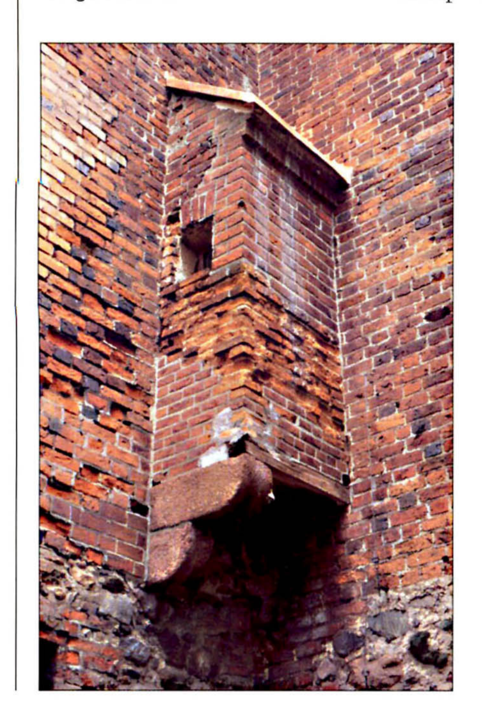
In 1511 Margrave Albrecht of Brandenburg was elected Grand Master, and under his guidance the Order became a secularised entity. The black cross disappeared from the white mantle and shield, and the Prussian State of the Order of the Teutonic Knights came finally to its end. Their castles still remained as important Polish fortresses, but their military effectiveness did not keep pace with developments elsewhere in Europe and the impressive medieval brick walls began to look very old-fashioned compared to the mighty angle-bastioned fortresses that now dominated military architecture. When King Gustav Adolf (Gustavus Adolphus) of Sweden invaded Poland in the 1620s there were no major sieges of the old castles. Armies faced each other from behind field fortifications rather than anachronistic brick walls and Gustav Adolf's victory at the battle of Mewe in 1626 had very little to do with the castle of Mewe (Gniew), which looked down on the battlefield. In 1628 Gustav Adolf's subsequent campaign captured Marienwerder (Kwidzyn) and Strasburg (Brodnica). The Poles besieged the latter place in 1629, but the Swedish relieving army managed to lure them away.

The state known as Prussia that was to make that name known throughout Europe in the centuries that followed bore no relation to the Prussia of the Teutonic Knights. In fact the new German attitude seemed to be one of turning its back on the past. Under Frederick the Great Marienburg was left as a crumbling ruin, the fate of so many of the once-great fortresses, while wars raged around them but seldom in them. It was only with the 19th-century revival of German nationalism that the Prussian crusader castles were 'discovered' and in many cases restored either to their former glory or to what some romantic architect thought they should look like.

Marienburg underwent the most spectacular rebuilding and, in 1902, the Kaiser attended a festival to mark the completion of its restoration where participants dressed as noble Teutonic Knights. He apparently wrote to his relative the King of England reminding him how Henry IV had once served as a crusader from within those very walls, but it elicited no latent crusading zeal in the breast of Edward VII!

During World War II the restored castle of Marienburg was almost reduced once more to its ruined state by aerial bombing, but when the war ended and the newly settled borders placed nearly all the crusader castles of Prussia within Poland, an extensive restoration programme began that produced the fascinating examples that can be seen today. Just as in the case of Edward I's castles in Wales, yesterday's symbols of oppression have become today's tourist attractions. Falconry demonstrations, jousts and battle re-enactments now take the place of real warfare outside the walls of the crusader castles of the Teutonic Knights.

At Neidenburg (Nidzica) in place of the latrine tower of Marienwerder there are simple projecting latrines like garderobes.



The crusader castles today

The following is a list of the most important Prussian castles mentioned in this book where anything has survived to be visited. For the convenience of visitors they are arranged in alphabetical order using the present Polish names. You are strongly advised to check opening times with the local Tourist Office.

Bierzglowo (Birgelow)
This castle was one of the first Teutonic fortresses in the Chelmno province, mentioned in records as early as 1242. Its original timber-and-earth castle was burned down by Lithuanian troops in 1263. Little has remained, but there is a fine bas relief of a knight over the gateway (copied at Malbork) and dated to 1305.

Braniewo (Braunsberg)
All that remains is one gate tower at Braniewo, which lies near to the border with Kaliningrad.

Brodnica (Strasburg)
A tall tower still exists at this minor site near Torun.

Chelmno (Kulm)
Only small fragments remain of the castle, but the city walls are still quite extensive, producing an interesting ensemble of the Order's civic life.

Dzialdowo (Soldau)
This is the first castle reached on the drive up from Warsaw. The site is presently being restored and should look very fine when it is finished.

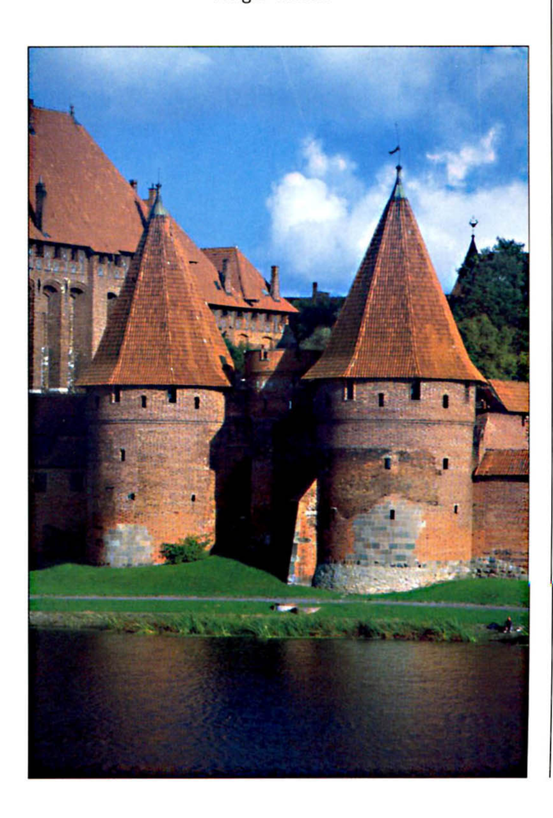
Elblag (Elbing)
Only a building of the outer castle survives from this very important fortress.

Frombork (Frauenburg)
Frombork presents a well-preserved and restored complex involving a castle town walls and a cathedral. This is a unique site that is worth visiting.

Golub-Dobrzyn (Gollub)
Converted into a palace, much of the original is retained and is worth a visit. The museum is good, with reproduction banners from Grunwald and some arms and armour.

Gniew (Mewe)
Well preserved and restored, Gniew enjoys a striking position overlooking the Wisla and hosts frequent re-enactment events.

Grudziadz (Graudenz)
Little of the castle remains, but the attraction here lies with the amazing granaries by the river. They are best viewed from the opposite bank, which can be reached by car.



Twin towers flank the St Nicholas Gate of Marienburg (Malbork). This was once the entrance to the bridge across the Nogat, which no longer exists.

Kaliningrad (Königsberg)

Kaliningrad is not in Poland but in the Russian enclave of the same name. Königsberg castle has sadly almost completely disappeared, but the cathedral is worth seeing.

Kaunas

Kaunas in Lithuania is a very interesting city, although little remains of the castle apart from one tower and a section of wall. Its situation between the two rivers may nevertheless be well appreciated.

Ketrzyn (Rastenburg)

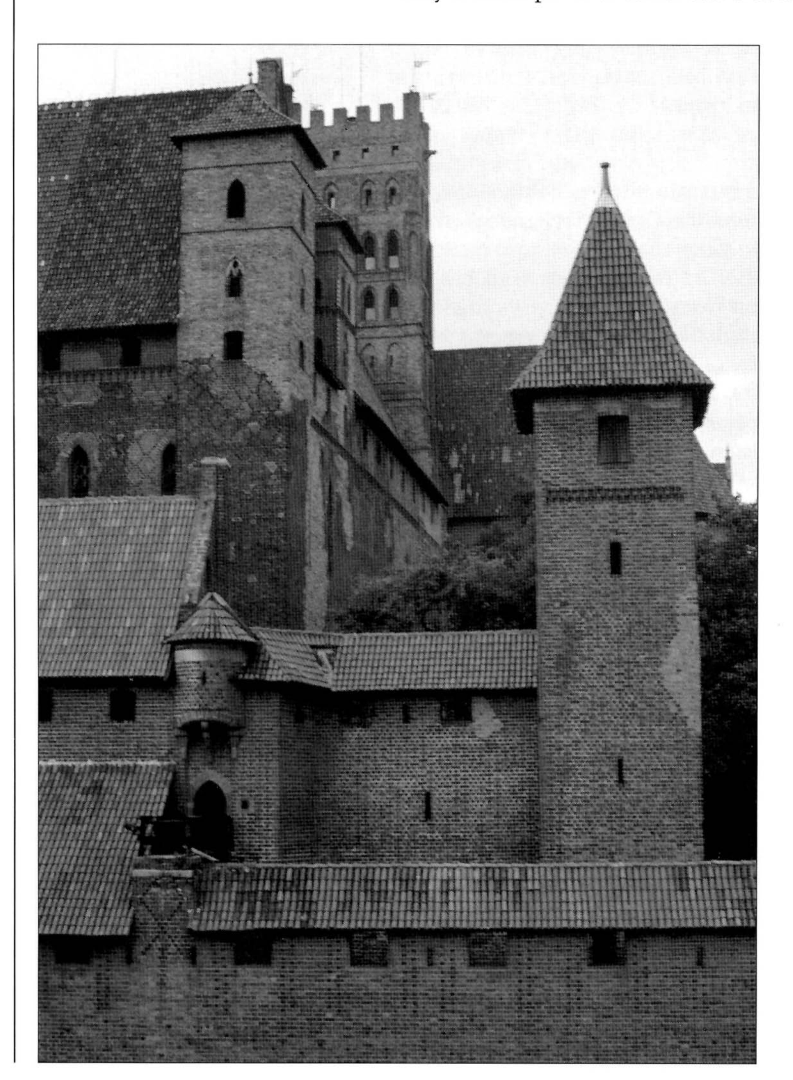
This is somewhat remote, being located in northeastern Poland, but has been sensitively restored.

Klaipeda (Memel)

This once important medieval fortress is all but lost in more modern fortifications in this major Lithuanian port.

Kowalewo (Schönsee)

Only a small piece of tower survives from this castle on the Drweca River line.



The south-eastern corner of the castle of Marienburg (Malbork) showing the harmonious intersection of residential and defensive works. In the background the main tower of the High Castle creates the highest point of emphasis in the panorama of the castle.

Kurzetnik (Kauernik)

Only ruined walls exist of this castle that once controlled the river crossing and played an important role in the Tannenberg campaign. The view from the top of the hill is a good one.

Kwidzyn (Marienwerder)

This is a spectacular site, with much to see in the magnificent cathedral and castle. The latrine tower is one of the sights of Poland, and there is an interesting museum.

Lidzbark Warminski (Heilsberg)

Lidzbark Warminski is one of the best-preserved castles in Poland, with much to see.

Malbork (Marienburg)

As one of Poland's prime tourist attractions, Malbork deservedly attracts thousands of visitors. As part of the Lower Castle has been converted into a superb and reasonably priced hotel, it is possible to stay the night and avoid all the crowds. There is a guided tour that lasts three hours, but it is also possible to pay a small fee to walk round the inner cloisters in the evening, which is an unforgettable experience.

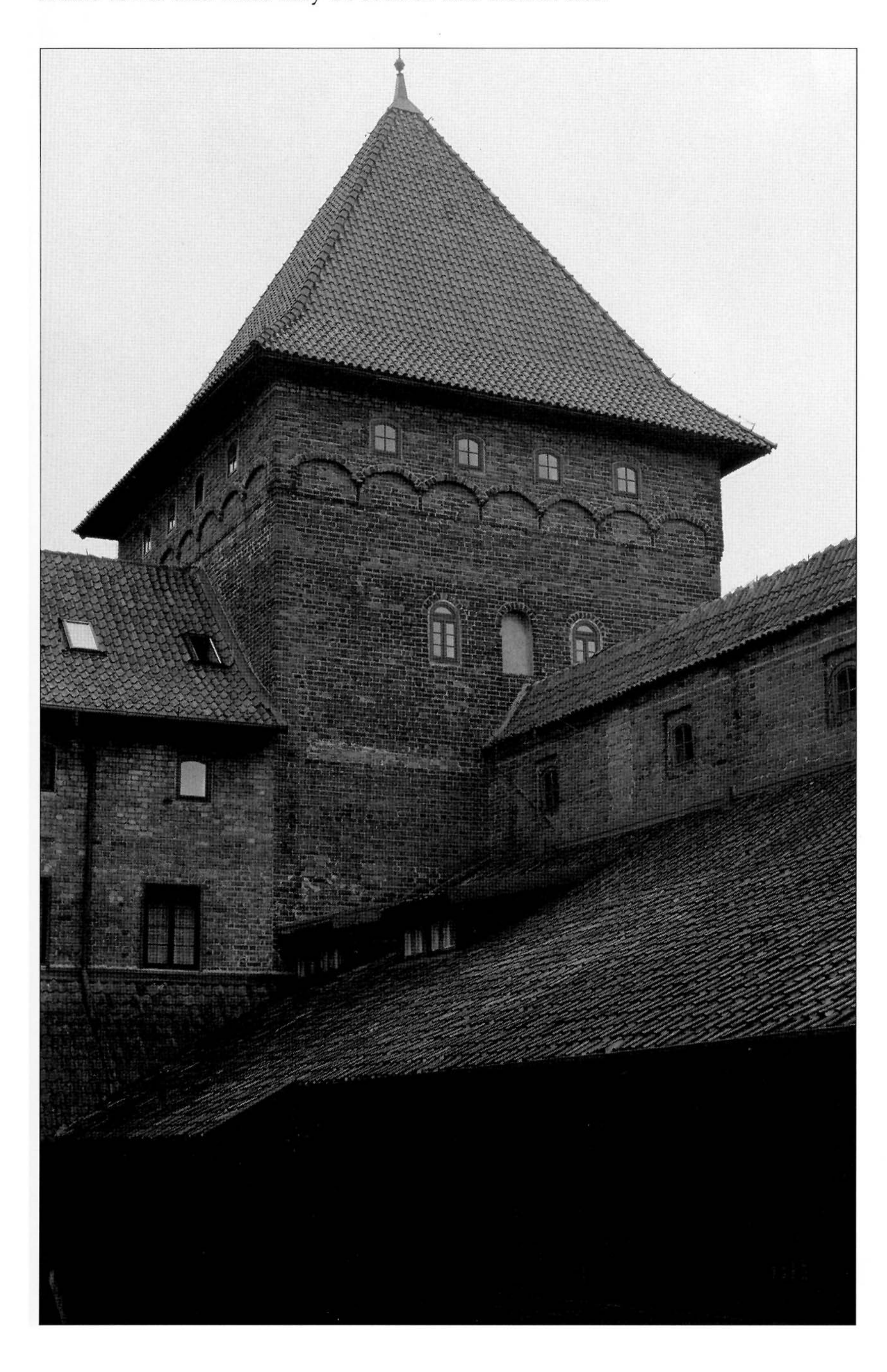
Nidzica (Neidenburg)

This is a compact and interesting late example of the crusader castle, well set out and atmospheric.

Olsztyn (Allenstein)
This is a fine site with much to see both inside and outside. The museum contains interesting exhibits about Copernicus and his astronomical discoveries.

Radzyn Chelminski (Reden)
A romantic ruin among crusader castles, this is an excellent site for studying architectural details.

Reszel (Rössel)
A fine tower and walls may be seen at this distant site.



At Neidenburg (Nidzica) two tremendous towers enclose a gatehouse that protrudes forwards from the walls.

The leaning tower of Thorn (Torun) may not be in the same category as its colleague in Pisa, but it is no less interesting. It forms part of the defence works of the city of Torun, and according to legend was built by a Teutonic Knight as a punishment for being drunk. The true reason is probably subsidence, but it now houses a pub!



Sztum (Stuhm)
Some interesting outbuildings survive at this small site near Malbork.

Szymbark (Schönberg)
Poland's most romantic ruin, Szymbark is like a huge gutted mansion that looks like something out of a horror film!

Swiecie (Schwetz)
Schwetz (Swiecie) was built between 1338 and 1349. A four-wing building with an inner courtyard had cylindrical towers at the corners, an unusual design features for the Order's structures. The preserved tower was probably the main tower and consisted of six storeys.

Torun (Thorn)
Torun is one of the most rewarding places to visit. Much of its castle lies in ruins, although the latrine tower is complete. The city walls and town hall are also very fine, and the Leaning Tower is now a fascinating pub!

Trakai
Although not a Teutonic Knights' castle as such, the island castle of Trakai, Lithuania's foremost historical tourist attraction, was designed by the Order's leading stonemason at the beginning of the 15th century. It is very reminiscent of Malbork and well worth a visit.

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Glossary

Bernsteinmeister - The Amber Master based at Lochstädt
chapter-general - a council attended by all the brethren
cogge - a type of ship used by the Order
dansk - detached latrine or sewage tower
Grosskomtur - grand commander
Grosschaffer - (Minister of Trade) in charge of developing commerce
Hauskomtur - house commander
Hochmeister - High Master
iarbusse - a form of severe punishment
Deutschmeister - German master
Komtur - commander of a castle
komtureis - commanderies, the administrative area of the Order's lands
Landkomtur - district commander
Landmeister - provincial master
Ordensmarschall - Marshal of the Order
reyza - a raid by crusaders into pagan territory
Spittler (hospitaler) - The commander of Christburg
Sword Brother - a member of Order of the Sword Brothers, later incorporated into the Teutonic Order
Trapier - Quartermaster. The commander of Elbing
Tressler - Treasurer

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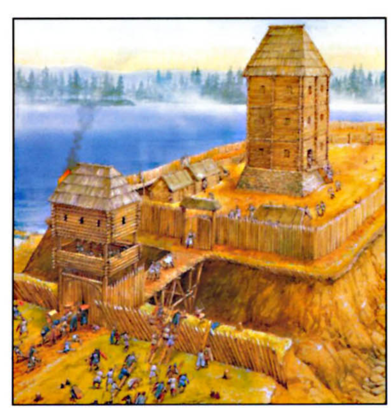
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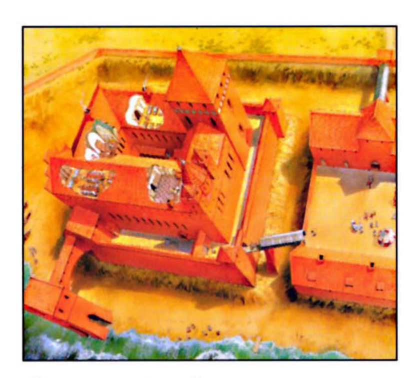
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